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SERMONS.

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S E R M O N S

ON CERTAIN OF

THE LESS PROMINENT

4

FACTS AND REFERENCES IN SACRED STORY.

BY

✓
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TO THE
CONGREGATION OF CAMDEN CHAPEL,
CAMBERWELL,

IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT

OF MANY KINDNESSES SHOWN HIM,
THROUGH YEARS OF HEALTH, AND MONTHS OF SICKNESS ;

AND IN THE HOPE

THAT WHAT IS NOW PUBLISHED MAY HELP

TO STRENGTHEN THEM FOR DUTY,

AND COMFORT THEM IN TRIAL,

This Volume

IS INSCRIBED WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF CHRISTIAN AFFECTION,

BY THEIR FAITHFUL FRIEND AND PASTOR,

THE AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E.

THE Author has selected the following sermons for publication, from having observed that passages of Scripture which may more easily be overlooked, as presenting nothing very prominent, prove especially interesting to an audience, when shown to be “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” He has material in hand for another volume of the like kind, and may hereafter commit it to the press, if he should have reason to think that the present has proved acceptable.

Camberwell,
January, 1843.

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S E R M O N I.

THE FAITH OF JOSEPH ON HIS DEATH-BED.

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“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones.”

WE have often occasion to point out to you what a difference there is in the standards by which God and men judge the relative worth or importance of things. In one great sense, indeed, there cannot be to God any of those distinctions which exist to ourselves; for, wondrously exalted as He is, things must be equal in his sight, which differ in ours in many respects and degrees. It is undoubtedly to forget the immeasurable distance of the Creator from the creature, to imagine that He who sitteth in the heavens, swaying the universal sceptre, regards as great, and as small, just what are reckoned such in our feeble computations. There ought to be nothing

clearer than this—if our great and our small were great and small to God, God would be little more than one of ourselves, judging by the same measures, and therefore possessing only the same faculties.

Yet, though the distinctions made by God must not be thought the same with those made by man, we are not to conclude that God admits no differences where differences are supposed by ourselves. We are evidently in error, if we think that what is great to us must be great to God, and that what is small to us must be small to God: but it is not necessary, in order to the avoiding this error, that we should confound great and small, or compute that in God's sight they must be actually the same. They may not be the same; they may be widely separated; and yet none of them may be great to God, none of them small: whilst, moreover, the Divine estimate may be the reverse of the human, great and small changing places, so far as difference is allowed between the two.

It is this latter fact on which we now chiefly wish to fix your attention. Take, for example, our sins. We deny that there can be such a thing as a sin which is small in God's sight; forasmuch as sin, from its very nature, must be of infinite guilt, because committed against an infinite Being. But this is not saying that there are no degrees in sin, as though God regarded all crimes as of equal enormity. One sin may be greater than another in the Divine estimate, as well as in the human; and yet God may

account no sin small, however ready we may be to think this or that inconsiderable. And what we are disposed to reckon trifling, may be precisely that to which God would attach the greater criminality; so that, as we have said, great and small may change places, and where both God and man admit a difference, you may have to reverse the judgment of the one to find that of the other. Sins of the mind, for instance, are ordinarily thought less of than sins of the flesh; pride incurs but slight reproof, whilst sensuality is heavily denounced. Yet the proud, perhaps, offers a more direct insult to God, and more invades his prerogative, than the sensual; and thus his offence may be the more hateful of the two in the sight of the Creator, whilst it receives, comparatively, no blame from the creature. Accordingly, there is nothing of which God speaks with greater loathing than of pride; the proud man is represented as the object of his special aversion. "God resisteth the proud." So that whilst with ourselves he puts a difference between sins, he inverts our decision, and assigns the greater atrociousness where we assign the less. Take, again, covetousness and drunkenness: these sins are neither thought by men, nor represented in Scripture, as of equal enormity. But which do men think the worse? The covetous man escapes with scarce a censure; the drunkard is the object of scorn and reprobation. But is this verdict ratified by the Bible? Nay, whilst the drunkard is unreservedly told that his sin shall exclude him from

the kingdom of heaven, the covetous man is identified with the idolater. No one who remembers what idolatry is, and how God denounces the worshipper of images, will hesitate to admit that such a representation places covetousness at the very top of things offensive to our Maker. How careful, then, ought we to be as to what standards we adopt, when we would estimate the relative guiltiness of sins! If we must distinguish sin from sin—though it were perhaps safer to confine ourselves to the truth, that all sin is infinitely heinous—let us take good heed that we always go for our rule to the Divine word, and not to human opinion.

And much the same may be said in regard of duties, and of actions which God may graciously be pleased to approve. It is not to be thought, that because no human action can deserve reward from God, all actions performed in his service must be of equal account. With virtues, as with vices, God may acknowledge great differences: He will not overlook, as too small for notice, the cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple; but he does not necessarily put this act of benevolence on a level with every other achievement of faith and of love. Yet here we have the same remark to make as with reference to sins. The Divine decision will, in many cases, be wholly different from the human; whilst actions are classified by the one as well as by the other, the superiority may be assigned in a contrary order. The act of righteousness, which we

should select as most worthy of commendation, and most demonstrative of piety of heart, may not be that on which the Almighty would fix, when signifying his approval of one of his servants. It may rather be, that some sacrifice which the world never knew, some exertion which was limited to his own home, and perhaps even his own heart, has been the most approved thing in the sight of the Lord, of all wrought by one whose time, and substance, and strength, have been wholly devoted to the cause of religion. It may not be when, like Paul, he is fighting "with beasts at Ephesus;" nor when, like Stephen, he is laying down his life for the truth, that a man of God does what specially draws on him the smile of his Maker. There may have been quiet and unobserved moments, moments spent in solitude and prayer, in which he has fought what God accounted a harder battle, and won a nobler victory. And in the arrangements of his household, in meeting some domestic trial, in subduing some unruly passion, he may virtually have displayed a stronger trust, and a simpler preference of the promises of the Most High, than when he has stood forth as the champion and confessor, amid all the excitement of a public scene, and gained for himself a deathless renown. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth:" and mightily should it console those who are not so circumstanced as to have great opportunity of making efforts and sacrifices on behalf of Christ and his cause, that it is not necessarily the martyr whose self-surrender is

most accepted of God, nor the missionary whose labours and endurances are most held in remembrance; but that the private Christian, in his struggles with himself, in his mortification of his passions, in the management of his family, in his patience under daily troubles, in his meek longings for a brighter world, may be yet dearer to his Father in Heaven, and be thought to have shown more of faith, than many a man who has entered boldly the desert of heathenism with the cross in his hand, or even ascended the scaffold to seal with his blood his confession of Christ.

Now all these remarks on the different standards by which God and man judge actions, will be found to bear directly on the words of our text. In this 11th chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul collects from the histories of patriarchs, and other worthies, instances and examples of the power of faith. And the question, in reference to our foregoing remarks, is, whether he has fixed upon those which we should have fixed upon ourselves. Inspired as the Apostle was, so that he must have been directed to facts most worthy of commemoration, we may not doubt that what he takes to show the faith of any one of the patriarchs, must be at least as strong an instance as his history contains. And if the instance selected by the Apostle be not that which we should have selected ourselves—if there be any other which we should have decidedly preferred—it is evident that our judgment differs from that of God; so

that we have precisely the case on which we have been speaking, the case in which what man would account best is not so accounted by Him who readeth the heart. But this, we suspect, is exactly what may be alleged in regard of our text. We give you the history of Joseph, a history more than commonly eventful, and which is narrated in Scripture with special minuteness. We set you down to the examining this history, in order that you may take out of it the incident, or the action, which shall most clearly demonstrate that Joseph had faith in God, and that this faith was a principle of great energy and strength. Do you think that you would make the same selection as St. Paul makes in our text? passing over all the trials of Joseph; all the afflictions which he bravely and meekly endured; his confidence in his interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, though on the truth of that interpretation depended his credit, and even his life; his eagerness to receive his father and brethren into the land, though every shepherd was "an abomination unto the Egyptians," and they were but likely to lower him in the general esteem—passing over, we say, all this, and having literally nothing to commemorate of Joseph, save that, when he was dying, he "made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones." Would this, we ask, have been the fact on which an uninspired writer would have fastened, when choosing from the history of Joseph what might best illustrate the

Patriarch's faith in God? Hardly, we think,—and if not, then you have a clear exemplification of the truth on which we have endeavoured to insist, that the actions which seem to men most conclusive, as evidences of righteousness of character, may not, after all, be those to which God would attach most worth and importance.

It is one thing, however, to allow that the selected proof is not that on which we ourselves should have fixed, and quite another to conclude, that, when pointed out, we cannot see its force. We may believe that you all concur with us in the opinion, that had an uninspired writer had to choose the best proof of faith from the history of Joseph, he would not have chosen that selected by St. Paul. But, nevertheless, we may be able to determine that the proof is a strong proof: if we cannot show it to be the strongest which the history furnishes, we may at least ascertain that it establishes the power of the principle which it is quoted to illustrate. This then it is which we must propose as our object through the remainder of our discourse. We have already drawn one valuable inference from the text, in that, through showing that God and men do not always judge alike in regard of righteous acts, it teaches us that the obscure individual, and the unnoticed deed, may be more approved above than the conspicuous leader, and the dazzling performance. But we have now to examine whether that for which Joseph stands commemorated by St. Paul, did not strikingly

demonstrate his faith. We put out of sight the surprising and varied occurrences of the patriarch's life ; and, standing round his death-bed, we will simply consider whether he did not display extraordinary faith, as we hear him make "mention of the departing of the children of Israel," and give "commandment concerning his bones."

Now who amongst you is unaware of the power which prosperity has of attaching men to earth ? of the unwillingness felt by those who have every gratification within reach, to submit to any change, or even to contemplate its possibility ? It is not necessary, in order to this consciousness, that you should yourselves abound in what the world has to offer, for then there would be comparatively few to whose feelings we might venture to appeal. But you are all judges as to the tendencies of our nature, when acted on by certain causes and circumstances ; and you may all therefore decide, from what you have experienced in yourselves, whether, in proportion as temporal advantages accumulate, man is not disposed to settle himself below, and to prefer the present to the future. If I were looking out for strong proof of the power of faith, of faith as dictating that eternal and invisible things be preferred to temporal and visible, I certainly should not go to the hovel, whose wretched inmate has scarce sufficient for subsistence ; I should rather turn to the palace where gorgeousness reigns, and all that our nature can desire is lavishly spread. It is not but that the inmate of

the hovel has a wide field for the exercise of faith, a far wider, in some respects, than the owner of the palace; but in the particular respect of a preference of the future to the present, of a readiness to give up the visible on the strength of a promise of God which refers to the invisible, the trial of faith is evidently with the man of abundance, rather than with him whose whole life is a series of struggles. The pauper may be said to have nothing to leave; there is nothing in his portion which can come, even in appearance, into competition with what is promised by God; whereas the noble has to separate from all that is most attractive in this lower creation, and to exchange a felt good for an unseen and untried. And, therefore, if we found the noble quite indifferent to what he had to abandon, so possessed with a persuasion of the immeasurably greater worth of invisible things, that he was all eagerness to enter on their enjoyment, we should say that here had faith won one of the finest of its triumphs, and that perhaps no where could its display be more conspicuous or convincing.

But it is something of this kind of display which is furnished by the deathbed of Joseph. We do not precisely mean to speak of this deathbed, as though it presented the same facts as that of a Christian, who, with his eye firmly fixed on the glories of heaven, is almost impatient to break away from the possessions of earth. Joseph lived when there were yet but dim notices of a world beyond the grave, and we may not

too confidently assume his acquaintance with a state of everlasting happiness. But there was every thing to make Joseph desire the settling his children and brethren permanently in Egypt; so that he had somewhat of the same difficulty to overcome in contemplating their removal, as the man who has to resign great present advantages, that he may enter on those promised in another state of being. The scene indeed soon changed: there arose another king "who knew not Joseph," and oppression weighed down the children of Israel. Had this change occurred before Joseph died, there would have been comparatively nothing striking in his making mention of the departure of his posterity, and showing that it occupied his last thoughts upon earth. It would then have been quite natural that he should have desired this departure, and pointed out, with his dying breath, the promise which ensured it, as the most precious of the legacies which he had to bequeath.

But when Joseph died, he was at the very summit of prosperity, scarcely second to the monarch on the throne, with a vast inheritance of honour and wealth to transmit to his children. He had, moreover, established his brethren in the land; so that he, who had been brought into Egypt a captive and an exile, saw himself at the head of a numerous tribe, which seemed growing to a power which scarce another could rival. I know what, in such a case, would have been the dictate of human policy and ambition. I know what the dying man would have said, had

he known nothing, or thought nothing, of the declarations of God in respect of his family. He would have advised that the colony, so successfully planted, should studiously avoid the uprooting itself from so congenial a soil, and take all possible pains to deepen and strengthen its hold. He would have contrasted the mean estate of his race, whilst they sojourned in Canaan, with the wealth and greatness acquired in Egypt, and have argued, from the comparison, that the true wisdom would be to remain where they were, rather than to return to the home of their fathers. You have only to think of Joseph as having risen from the lowest to the highest condition; as the founder, to all appearance, of a mighty dynasty, of a family possessed of almost regal power; and you will readily admit that the thoughts most likely to have occupied his mind were thoughts of the future fortunes of his house, fortunes of which he might augur well if his children continued in Egypt, but which would be altogether perilled by their quitting that country.

And had there not been a higher principle in Joseph than that of worldly policy or ambition; had he been merely a leader who sought aggrandisement and distinction for himself and his posterity; it is not credible that his dying words would have been those which were calculated to unsettle his tribe, and to lead their thoughts from the land where they were most likely to be great. For Joseph might, at the least, have kept silence in regard of the predicted

change of residence : if, with the consciousness that God had spoken of a going back to Canaan, he could not have distinctly advised the settling in Egypt, yet whilst there seemed so much to recommend the remaining where they were, he might have abstained from speaking to his children of their being removed.

But Joseph was something more than the founder of a powerful line ; and the feelings which actuated him were not those of policy and ambition. Joseph was a man who feared the Lord, and with whom the word of the Most High prevailed against all dictates of carnal wisdom or desire. It was nothing to Joseph that he had wonderfully attained to lordship over Egypt, and that now, in quitting the world, he seemed to have that lordship to hand down to his children. He knew that God had revealed to his fathers a purpose of giving another land to them and to their seed ; and that it was not in Egypt, fair and fertile though it was, that he designed to carry on the mysterious dispensation which should issue in the redemption of the world. And therefore were Joseph's thoughts on Canaan rather than on Egypt ; on Canaan, in which as yet his family possessed nothing but a burial-place, rather than on Egypt, where already they were masters of houses and lands. Oh, my brethren, before you pronounce that there was no great trial or display of faith, in Joseph's making mention, under such circumstances, of the departure of the Israelites, consider the difficulty, experienced

by yourselves, in preferring what is future to what is present, in giving up a good, of which you have the possession, for another of which you have only the promise. For it was this which Joseph had to do; and that, moreover, at the least in as great a degree as is ever imposed upon us. You know very well that you find it hard to make up the mind to a separation from objects, sought perhaps with eagerness, and obtained with difficulty; though you profess to believe, that, on passing away from earthly possessions, you are to enter upon others a thousandfold more desirable. And you would perhaps find it yet harder, to make distinct arrangements for the destruction of the fabric which your whole life had been occupied in perfecting, and which, after long trial and struggle, seemed complete in every part, just because there was a saying, referring to a yet remote time, which seemed to pledge God to the building up that fabric in some remote place.

But this was exactly the task assigned to Joseph on his death-bed; and the more you suppose that the patriarch had but little knowledge of heaven and its joys, the more surprising do you make it, that he should have endangered, on the strength of the Divine word, the temporal prosperity of his tribe. For, where eternal sanctions were but dimly revealed, temporal considerations must have had great weight; and the dying leader, who could hardly speak of afflictions as leading to glory, would be strongly moved to the hiding afflictions, to the leaving them.

at least, to be found out by experience. But Joseph was too much penetrated by confidence in the declarations of God, to allow of his conferring with flesh and blood, or being deterred by probable consequences. It is a fine, a noble scene, which is brought before us by the simple record of the historian; and I call upon you to behold it, that you may learn what faith can do against the promptings of nature, the suggestions of suspicion, and the dictates of pride. I know what would be likely to be the uppermost feelings in that expiring man, who, amid all the insignia of authority and wealth, is bidding farewell to brethren and children. I know what he might be expected to do and to say. His wasted features might be lit up with a smile of exultation, as he surveyed the tokens of almost regal state; and he might say to those around, "Behold the glory to which I have raised you, and which I bequeath to you and your posterity. It will be your own fault if this glory decay: the best of all Egypt is yours, if you do not, through indolence or love of change, suffer that it be wrested from your hold. I have made, I leave you great—great, as chieftains in an adopted country; forsake not that country, and your greatness may be as permanent as it is dazzling." But nothing of this kind proceeds from the dying man's lips. He speaks only of the abandonment of all the glory and greatness; of an abandonment which might perhaps not be distant; for he gives directions as to his burial in some unpossessed land. Interpret or paraphrase

his last words, and they are as though he had said, "Children and brethren, be not deceived by your present prosperity; this is not your home; it is not here, notwithstanding the appearances, that God wills to separate and consecrate you to Himself. Ye are the descendants of Abraham; and Egypt, with its idols, is no resting-place for such. Ye must be ever on the alert, expecting the signal of departure from a land, whose treasures and glories are but likely to detain you from the high calling designed for you by God. Settle not then yourselves, but be ye always as strangers; strangers where you seem firmly established, and where, by a marvellous concurrence of events, you have risen to dominion."

Such, we say, are virtually the utterances of the expiring patriarch. And when you think that, by these utterances, he was taking the most effectual way of destroying the structure so surprisingly reared, and on which it were incredible that he did not himself gaze with amazement and delight; that he was detaching those whom he loved from all which, on human calculation, was most fitted to uphold them in glory and power—oh, you may tell me of other demonstrations and workings of that principle, by which servants of the Lord have "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions;" but I can see that nothing short of this principle, ay, and of this principle in a very high degree, could have moved the dying man to such words as he spoke; and I assent, in all its breadth,

to the statement of St. Paul, that it was "by faith" that "Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel."

But we have not yet spoken of Joseph's giving "commandment concerning his bones;" and this is far too memorable a circumstance to be passed over without special comment. We must refer to the Book of Genesis, in order to see what the commandment was. There you read, "And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence." The oath was remembered and kept; for it is expressly recorded, in the account of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him." Neither were these bones neglected in the wilderness: they must have been religiously preserved during all the wanderings of the people; for you read in the Book of Joshua, "And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem."

It appears from these historical notices, when joined with the reference made by St. Paul in our text, that great importance is attached by inspired writers to the fact of Joseph's giving commandment concerning his bones. And the fact certainly deserves the being carefully pondered, though you may have been used to pass it over with but little attention. It would seem that Joseph was never buried in Egypt; for, after mentioning the oath which he

took of his brethren, the Book of Genesis concludes with saying, "So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt." When you connect this statement with his dying injunction, and with the fact, that, though the Israelites were thrust out in haste from the land, they carried with them the remains of the patriarch, you can hardly doubt that the body of Joseph, when embalmed, was kept unburied amongst his people, and that its being so kept was included in his parting injunction. And this is the more remarkable, inasmuch as no reason can be given why Joseph, had he wished it, might not at once have been buried in Canaan. When one reads of his giving "commandment concerning his bones," the obvious feeling is, that, with that desire which seems instinctive to man, the desire that our dust should mingle with that of those whom we have loved and lost, Joseph gave directions for his being laid in the same grave with his father and mother. But, had this been all, why was not his body at once carried into Canaan? When Jacob died, "all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house," went up, and interred him, according to his wish, "in the cave of the field of Machpelah." So vast was the funeral pomp, that, "when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning

to the Egyptians: wherefore the name of it was called Abel-mizraim, which is beyond Jordan." Surely, if such were the interment of Jacob, that of Joseph would not have been less honoured: had he commanded his brethren, as he had been commanded by his father, "In my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me," we may not doubt that the Egyptians would not only have permitted the funeral, but have graced his obsequies with all that could give splendour to death.

It follows, therefore, that it was not merely interment in Canaan which Joseph desired: it was expressly his wish, that the interment should be deferred until the children of Israel departed from Egypt, and that then should his bones be carried up to the land which had been promised to Abraham. In short, the "commandment concerning his bones," which St. Paul adduces in proof of Joseph's faith, would seem to have been a commandment that his bones should lie unburied whilst the Israelites were in Egypt, and be buried when they took possession of Canaan. But what was there in this which specially proved faith? What evidence does the commandment which Joseph gave "concerning his bones," add to that furnished by the mention which he made "of the departing of the children of Israel?" Here is a point worthy of all your attention, though there will be no great difficulty in finding a satisfactory answer.

Why, think ye, did Joseph wish to lie unburied in the midst of his people, except that his bones might perpetually preach to them, that Egypt was not to be their home, but must be abandoned for Canaan? The very lesson which, with his dying breath, he laboured to enforce—the lesson, that they were to be expecting to depart from the country which had received and sustained them, this lesson he longed to enforce after death, knowing, as he did, that his brethren and children would be likely to forget it. But how shall he accomplish this? What means are in his power of continuing to preach a great truth, when he shall have been actually withdrawn out of life? Let his bones lie unburied, unburied because they wait the being carried up to Canaan, and will there not be an abiding memento to the Israelites, a standing remembrancer, that, sooner or later, the Lord will effect their removal, and transplant them to the land which He promised to their fathers? It is in this way that we interpret the commandment of Joseph. You have heard of the preaching of a spectre: the spirit that passed before the face of Eliphaz, and caused the hair of his flesh to stand up, came from the invisible world to give emphasis, as well as utterance, to the question, “Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more just than his Maker?” And here you have, not the preaching of a spectre, but the preaching of a skeleton: the bones of Joseph are converted into an orator, and make “mention of the departing of the children of Israel.”

The patriarch could no longer warn and command his brethren and descendants with the voice of a living man: his tongue was mute in death; but there was eloquence in his unsepulchred limbs. Wherefore had he not been gathered to his fathers? what meant this strange spectacle in the midst of a people, the spectacle of a corpse to which a grave seemed denied, and which was kept, as though by some wild mysterious spell, from going down with others to the chambers of death? It was a dead thing, which nevertheless appeared reluctant to die: it seemed to haunt the earth in its lifelessness, as though it had not finished the office for which it had been born, as though it had yet some awful duty to perform, ere it could be suffered to mingle quietly with the dust whence it sprung. And since it could not fail to be known for what purpose the body of one, so honoured and revered, lay unburied year after year—even for that of being removed by the Israelites, when God should visit them, and transplant them from Egypt,—did not Joseph's bones perpetually repeat his dying utterances? and could any thing better have been devised to keep up the remembrance of what his last words had taught, than this his subsistence as a skeleton, when he had long ceased to be numbered with the living?

There can hardly then be two opinions, that the bones of Joseph, thus reserved for interment in Canaan, became virtually a preacher to the people of the very truth which he had died in the effort to

enforce. But what additional evidence of his faith was there in his giving "commandment concerning his bones?" The very greatest. It is one thing to preach a doctrine during life: it is another to be eager to preach it after death. See ye not this? see ye not that the faith, which might be strong enough to urge to the advocacy of an opinion now, might not be strong enough to urge to the taking measures for its advocacy a hundred years hence? A man might have his misgivings: he might say to himself, "Perhaps, when I am dead, something will arise to prove me in the wrong; why then should I strive to keep the opinion from being forgotten, when events will have transpired to show it erroneous? If the opinion be true, others will arise to maintain it: if false, why should my belief in it be made, through mine own act, to survive its being exploded? Better surely for me to teach what I think true whilst I live, but not to stake my credit, when dead, on propositions which time may disprove."

We are thus persuaded, that, if you consider attentively, you cannot fail to allow it a strong additional evidence of a man's belief in a tenet, when, over and above proclaiming it whilst he lives, he labours to bring about that he may proclaim it when dead. I would preach, if I might, after death. I would not be silent, if I knew how to speak, when the grave shall have received me, and another shall stand to minister in my place. I would still repeat the truths which I now strive habitually to press on

men's attention. But why? Because I am confident of their being truths; because I have no misgivings; because I have not even the shadow of a suspicion, that, happen what may, Christianity can be proved false, and the Bible a fiction. If I had, I should be proportionably reluctant to the preaching after death; my anxiety to utter truth would make me shrink from the possibility of being found hereafter giving utterance to falsehood.

And to show this more clearly by a particular instance, which shall be nearly parallel to that in our text. There are declarations in the Bible, that the Lord, whom the heavens have received, shall come forth personally, in glory and great majesty, and revisit this earth to claim its dominion. There are also predictions as to the time of this splendid manifestation, though not so explicit but that men may widely differ as to when it shall be. Suppose that by the study of unfulfilled prophecy, I satisfy myself as to the date of Christ's coming, fixing it to seventy, or eighty, or a hundred years hence. Suppose that, so long as I live, I keep asserting to you this date, you will conclude that I believe it myself. Suppose that, when I come to die, I gather you around me, and solemnly declare that at the said time the Lord will reappear, you will be more than ever convinced of my belief: dying men have little interest in deceiving; and though you may not be a jot the more persuaded that my opinion is true, there will be scarcely room for doubt as to my sincerity in holding

it. But suppose something more: suppose that, as I die, I give directions for the erecting of a monument, to be reared in the very scene of my labours, and inscribed with the very date on which I had so resolutely fixed. I should thus be taking all possible pains to keep my opinion before your eyes, and those of your children; to keep it, when things might have occurred to prove it false, when it might be nothing but a register of my ignorance and mistake: and would not this be the crowning, the insurpassable evidence of the strength of my faith? if I had the slightest suspicion, or fear, that the event might prove me wrong, would I ever take measures for identifying my name with error and delusion?

And this just illustrates the case of Joseph's giving "commandment concerning his bones." There was no proof, in his giving this commandment, that the children of Israel would depart out of Egypt, even as there would be none in my directions for a monument, that the Redeemer would appear at the specified time. But there was a very strong proof, that Joseph believed that the Israelites would depart out of Egypt, just as there would be that I believed that Christ would come on the day which I had named. And it is simply in illustration of the power of Joseph's faith, that St. Paul quotes his giving "commandment concerning his bones." The illustration is therefore most appropriate. There were long years—as probably Joseph was aware—years of woe and oppression, to pass over Israel ere there would!

come that visitation of the Lord, which his dying words affirmed. And during this dreary period it would seem to the Israelites as though they were forgotten of their God, as though his promise had come utterly to an end, and they were doomed to remain in the house of bondage for ever. What, then, more likely than that whatever reminded them of the alleged purpose of God would be treated by them with loathing and scorn; and that, whether it were the dead or the living who predicted their departure, the mention would excite only hatred and derision? Yet Joseph was not to be moved by any of this likelihood. Why not? Because his faith was too strong: he was too confident in God's word to allow of his taking into account the possibility of its failure. And therefore he did not hesitate to convert his bones into a perpetual preacher, or monument, of that word. "I shall not leave you," he seems to say to his weeping kinsmen. "I die; but this worn body has a high duty to accomplish, ere it may enjoy the still slumber of the grave. I leave it to preach to you that God will yet bring you up from Egypt 'with a mighty hand, and a stretched out arm.' You, or your children, may be disposed to insult my remains, when oppression shall grow, and deliverance be deferred. But I know how all this will terminate. Mine eye, over which the film of death is fast gathering, is on a mighty procession, the procession of thousands, and tens of thousands, marching to the inheritance which God promised

unto Abraham ; and in the midst of this procession shall these bones be triumphantly carried, their office done, to share with you the land of Canaan." Oh ! who can fail to see that Joseph thus furnished a far stronger proof of trust in God's word than is found in his mere assertion of what that word declared ? Who can deny that St. Paul added vastly to the illustration of the power of faith, when, after stating that "by faith" Joseph, when he died, "made mention of the departing of the children of Israel," he subjoined, "and gave commandment concerning his bones?"

But we ought not to fail to observe, before we quit the death-bed of Joseph, that, forasmuch as unquestionably the Spirit of God actuated the expiring Patriarch, and perhaps dictated his words, the commandment as to his bones may have been designed to intimate, or illustrate, the truth of a resurrection. If you suppose, as you reasonably may, that they who surrounded the dying man considered his utterances as suggested by God, you will believe that they pondered them as fraught with information, conveying, probably, notices upon points which had been but dimly, if at all, revealed. We need hardly observe to you, that, so far as the evidence of faith is concerned, it would be most conspicuous and convincing, on the supposition that Joseph had respect to the resurrection of his body. It may have been so. Why was he unwilling that his bones should rest in Egypt ? Unwilling he evidently was ; for, allowing him to have desired their remaining unburied that

they might remind the Israelites of their predicted departure, this is no reason why he should also have given directions for their being carried into Canaan. By remaining unburied he would have shown an anxiety to preach a great fact to his descendants; but, by further desiring that, when this office was done, he might be buried in the promised land, he evinced a care as to his place of sepulture, or showed that it was not indifferent to him what became of his body.

Wherefore, then, we again ask, was he unwilling to be buried in Egypt? What had he to do with choosing where his bones should be laid, and that, too, on a far distant day? I cannot but infer, from this anxiety of Joseph in regard to his grave, that he did not consider the body as a thing to be thrown aside so soon as the vital principle were extinct. He felt that his dead body might live to admonish his countrymen; but he must also have felt that, even when that office were done, it was not to be treated as of no further worth. It matters not whether it arise from a kind of natural instinct, or from the immediate suggestion of the Spirit of God—in all cases, care as to what becomes of the body, is evidence of a consciousness that the body is not finally to perish at death. He who shows anxiety as to the treatment of his remains shows something of a belief, whether he confess it or not, that these remains are reserved for other purposes and scenes. I can hardly think that Joseph believed that his body

would never live again : he would scarcely have provided it a sepulchre in Canaan, if persuaded that, in dying, it would be finally destroyed. His bones might as well have rested in Egypt, amongst those of the idolater and stranger, had they never been appointed, or had he not imagined them appointed, to the being brought up from the dust and again sinewed with life. But on the supposition of a belief, or even the faintest conjecture, of a resurrection, we seem to understand why the dying patriarch longed to sleep in the promised land. "I will not leave," he seems to say, "this body to be disregarded, and trampled on, as though it were merely that of an animal whose existence wholly terminates at death. That which God takes care of, reserving it for another life, it becomes not man to despise, as though undeserving a thought. And though the eye of the Almighty would be on my dust in Egypt, as in Canaan, yet would I rather rest with the righteous than with the wicked in the grave, with my fathers and my kinsmen, than with the foreigner and the enemy. If I am to start from long and dark slumber, let those who wake with me be those whom I have loved, and who are to share with me the unknown existence."

Such, we say, is an interpretation which might fairly be put on Joseph's giving "commandment concerning his bones." There may have floated before him visions of the grave giving up its dead. The yearnings of his parting spirit after Canaan ; the

longing for interment by the side of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; all may have risen from an indistinct thought that he was destined to live again; all may mark that, though life and immortality were not then brought to light, dim and spectral images flitted to and fro, shadowy forms, as of the decayed and the dead, mysteriously reconstructed and reanimated. And if they who stood around Joseph recognized, as they must have done in the last words of Jacob, the dictates of the Almighty himself, then may we say that the "commandment concerning his bones" amounted to a Divine intimation of the truth of a resurrection. Whatever showed that God willed that the dead body should be cared for, that he would not have it thrown aside as utterly done with, went also to the showing that the body was still to be of use, and that, therefore, its resurrection was designed. Hence, it may be that from the death-bed of Joseph sprang, in a measure, that persuasion of a resurrection, which gradually wrought itself into the creed of the children of Israel. His "commandment concerning his bones," kept so long in mind, and associated with a great crisis in the national history, may have produced attention, not only to the departure from Egypt, but to a far mightier departure—the departure of myriads from the sepulchres of the earth, after long enthrallment under a sterner than Pharaoh. I feel as if it were to attach surprising interest to Joseph's last words, to suppose that they showed his own thought, and gave notice

to others, of the resurrection of the body. This makes his death-bed that almost of a Christian. It is not a Christian thing, to die manifesting indifference as to what is done with the body. That body is redeemed: not a particle of its dust but was bought with drops of Christ's precious blood. That body is appointed to a glorious condition: not a particle of the corruptible but what shall put on incorruption; of the mortal that shall not assume immortality. The Christian knows this: it is not the part of a Christian to seem unmindful of this. He may, therefore, as he departs, speak of the place where he would wish to be laid. "Let me sleep," he may say, "with my father and my mother, with my wife and my children: lay me not here, in this distant land, where my dust cannot mingle with its kindred. I would be chimed to my grave by my own village bell, and have my requiem sung where I was baptized into Christ." Marvel ye at such last words? Wonder ye that one, whose spirit is just entering the separate state, should have this care for the body which he is about to leave to the worms? Nay, he is a believer in Jesus as "the Resurrection and the Life:" this belief prompts his dying words; and it shall have to be said of him, as of Joseph, that "by faith," yea, "by faith," he "gave commandment concerning his bones."

S E R M O N II.

ANGELS AS REMEMBRANCERS.

ST. LUKE xxiv. 6, 7, 8.

“ He is not here, but is risen : remember how he spake unto you, when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words.”

It was a saying of Luther, and one which is often quoted amongst ourselves, “that the doctrine of justification by faith is the doctrine of a standing or a falling church.” The meaning of the saying is, that so vitally important, so essential to the very existence of a Christian community, is the doctrine of justification by faith, that you may always judge whether a Church is in a healthful or a declining condition, by the tenacity with which this doctrine is maintained, and the clearness with which it is expounded. We have no wish to dispute the truth of the saying; for, beyond all question, there

can be real Christianity only where there is a distinct recognition of the fact, that "a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

But, nevertheless, if we were to fix on any one doctrine, as furnishing pre-eminently a test by which to try the condition of a Church, we should be disposed to take that of spiritual influences, rather than that of justification by faith. We cannot but think that he who fails to recognize, in all its freeness, that we are "justified by faith," must first have failed to recognize, in all humility, that "we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing, as of ourselves." It would seem to follow, in natural consequence, from our fancying ourselves independent on supernatural teaching, that we should fancy ourselves capable, in a measure, of contributing to our justification; so that, at all events, he who practically forgets that the Holy Spirit can alone guide into truth, is likely to be soon landed in error on the fundamental points of a sinner's acceptance. And whether or not the doctrine of spiritual influences be the better test to apply, in attempting to determine the condition of a Church, there can, at least, be no doubt that where piety is flourishing, this doctrine will be deeply cherished; where declining, comparatively neglected. The individual Christian will "grow in grace," in proportion as he depends on the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and habituates himself to the turning to this divine agent for guidance, comfort, and instruction in righteousness. And any branch of the

Catholic Church will, in like manner, be vigorous and fruitful, in proportion as it honours the Third Person in the ever blessed Trinity, distinctly recognizing that his influences alone can make the work of the Second effectual to salvation.

But when we speak of spiritual influence, we are far from wishing to confine the expression to the influences of the Holy Ghost, as though no other spiritual agency were brought to bear upon man. We desire to extend it to created, though invisible, beings—to angels, whether evil or good—believing, on the authority of Scripture, that there are such beings, and that they continually act on us by a secret, but most efficient, power. And where there is a tolerably distinct recognition of the person and office of the Holy Ghost, there may be a comparative forgetfulness, if not an actual denial, of angelic ministrations; and our conviction is, that much of comfort in religion is lost, and much of coldness produced, through the little heed given to spiritual influences, thus more largely understood. It will hardly be denied that the mass of Christians think little, if at all, of angels; that they regard them as beings so far removed from companionship with ourselves, that discourse on their nature and occupation must deserve the character of unprofitable speculation. If, then, the preacher take as his theme the burning spirits which surround God's throne, he will probably be considered as adventuring upon myste-

ries too high for research, whilst there is abundance of more practical topics on which he might enlarge.

Yet it cannot have been intended that we should thus remain ignorant of angels: it cannot be true that there is nothing to be ascertained in regard of these creatures, or nothing which it is for our instruction, or our comfort, to know. There is a petition in the Lord's prayer which should teach us better than this—"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven." It must be specially by angels that God's will is done in Heaven; and if we are directed to take the manner, or degree, in which angels do God's will, as measuring that in which we should desire its being done by men, surely it can neither be beyond our power to know any thing of angels, nor unimportant that we study to be wise up to what is written regarding them in the Bible. And, indeed, so far is Scripture from leaving angelic ministrations amongst obscure, or inscrutable, things, that it interweaves it with the most encouraging of its promises, and thus strives, as it were, to force it upon us as a practical and personal truth. Where is the Christian that has not been gladdened by words such as these, "Because thou hast made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling?" But of those to whom these words speak cheeringly, how few, perhaps, give attention to the following verse, though evidently

explanatory of the agency through which the promise shall be accomplished! "for he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

And it ought not to be overlooked, that, in proportion as we lose sight of the doctrine, that good angels are "ministering spirits," influencing us for righteousness, we are likely to forget the power of our great "adversary, the devil," who, with the hosts under his guidance, continually labours at effecting our destruction. It can hardly be that they, who are keenly alive to their exposure to the assaults of malignant, but invisible, enemies, should be indifferent to the fact of their having on their side the armies of Heaven: good and evil spirits must be considered as antagonists in a struggle for ascendancy over man; and there is, therefore, more than a likelihood, that they who think little of their friends in so high a contest, will depreciate their foes, and thus more than ever expose themselves to their power.

We cannot, then, put from us the opinion that the doctrine of angelic ministrations hardly obtains its due share of attention, and that it ought to be pressed, with greater frequency and urgency, by the ministers of Christ, on those committed to their care. There is, indeed, a risk, that he who sets himself to discourse on those orders of intelligent being which stretch upwards between God and man, may indulge in fanciful speculation, and forget, amid the brilliancies opened up to his imagination, that he is

bound exclusively to seek the profit of his hearers. But there is little fear of his passing the limits of what is sober and instructive, so long as he confines himself to what is written in Scripture, and fixes on certain prominent facts which lie beyond dispute, because explicitly revealed. It is this which we purpose doing in our present discourse. We wish, indeed, to impress upon you that a spiritual agency is ever at work on your behalf, understanding by spiritual agency not merely that of the Holy Ghost, to which every other must be necessarily subordinate, but that of those orders of being which are designated in Scripture by the general term, "angels," and which kept their "first estate," when numbers of like nature with themselves, were cast out from Heaven as rebels against God. But, at the same time, we are very anxious to advance nothing which shall not have Scriptural warrant for its truth, and which shall not, moreover, present something practical on which you may fasten. Let us see, then, whether the passage which we have taken as our text, will not enable us to illustrate, thus soberly and profitably, the truth, that angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."

Now you will judge at once, from this introduction to our subject, that we do not purpose speaking on the fact of the resurrection of Christ, though this fact, as matter both of prophecy and history, seems exclusively treated of in the words of our text.

What we want you to observe is, that these words were spoken by two angels, who appeared to the women that were early at the sepulchre ; for, though it is said in the chapter before us, “two men stood by them in shining garments,” you readily find, from a comparison of the Gospels, that the human form was here assumed by heavenly beings ; that they were spirits who, in the likeness of flesh, accosted the women as they sought in vain for the body of Christ. It is not here to be proved that there are such beings as angels ; neither have we to show that they are endowed with great might ; for not only is St. Matthew’s description of the apparition of the men, that “the angel of the Lord descended from Heaven ;” but he adds, that “his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow : for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.” But assuming, as we safely may, the facts of the ministration and power of angels, there is something very remarkable in the circumstance that the angels, in the case now before us, reminded the women of something which had been said to them by Christ, and that, too, in a remote place, “whilst he was yet with them in Galilee.” How came these angels to be so well acquainted with what had been said by Christ to the women ? They speak of it with the greatest familiarity, as though they had themselves heard the prediction : they call it to the remembrance of the women, just as one of you might remind his neighbour, or friend, of parts of a sermon

at whose delivery both had been present. We do not, indeed, profess to say that the angels might not have been distinctly informed as to what Christ had uttered in Galilee; that they might not have been instructed, by immediate revelation, as to things which had passed when themselves were not present to see or to hear. But neither, on the other hand, can any one say that the angels did not gain their knowledge from having been actually amongst the audience of Christ; whilst the supposition of their having heard for themselves, agrees best with the tone of their address, and is certainly in keeping with other statements of Scripture.

For if we gather, from the familiar manner in which the angels quote Christ's sayings to the women, that they, as well as the women, had been present when those sayings were uttered, we only infer—what may be proved the doctrine of the Bible—that angels are actually, though invisibly, in the midst of our worshipping assemblies, witnesses of our deportment, and hearers of that Gospel to which, too often, we give so languid an attention. This would seem to be the doctrine of St. Paul, when he speaks to the Ephesians of the preaching of the Gospel as “to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.” Here the Church, in and through her public ministrations, is represented as furnishing instruction to angelic orders of being, as though these lofty creatures came down to her

solemn assemblies, not only as observers, but as seeking lessons for themselves in mysteries which, beforetime, they had vainly striven to explore. And when the same Apostle exhorts the Corinthian women to have a modest veil, or covering, over their heads, in their religious meetings, he persuades them by this very consideration, that they appeared in the presence of the angels—"because of the angels,"—and thus gives all the sanction of his authority to the opinion, that angels are amongst us when we gather together for public worship.

This, then, is the first conclusion, a conclusion borne out by other statements of Scripture, which we derive from the familiar acquaintance which the angels manifest with what Christ had said to the women in Galilee; namely, that angels are present when the Gospel is preached: angels had in all likelihood been present when the Redeemer announced his death and resurrection; and we may believe that, similarly, as the proclamation of redemption is now solemnly and stately made, there are other auditors besides those whom our senses can discern; that, like the prophet's servant, we need only the purging and strengthening of our vision, and, in addition to the breathing masses of our fellow men, we should presently ascertain the place of our assembling to be thronged with burning forms, those stately intelligences which are "the ministers of God," executing his will throughout his vast and replenished dominion. And we need hardly stay to point out to you

what an additional solemnity this should cast over these our gatherings in the house of the Lord; for it must commend itself to you all, that the being actually under the observation of the heavenly hosts, the having in the midst of us, as inspectors of what passes, a multitude of glorious creatures, the cherubim and seraphim that are permitted to enter the immediate presence of God himself, should greatly tend to the banishing from amongst us all that is cold and frivolous and listless, and to the keeping us in that attitude of reverent attention which should be always assumed, yet is often wanting, where men profess to seek an audience of their Maker.

But we wish specially to impress upon you a purpose for which angels may be present at the preaching of the Gospel, and which may be taken as illustrating generally the nature of their ministrations on our behalf. We gather at once, from our Lord's parable of the sower, as expounded by Himself, that Satan busily endeavours to counteract the preaching of the Gospel; for it is said, in explanation of the seed sown by the way-side, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart." There is no interpretation to be put upon this, save that the devil is ever watching the effect wrought by the delivery of the word, and that, with an earnestness only equalled by his malice, he labours to thwart it, whensoever it threatens to be injurious to his power.

And if evil angels be thus present at the preaching of the Gospel, in the hope of making it ineffectual, why should we doubt that good angels are present, to strive to gain it place, and give it impressiveness? Present, we have every assurance that they are; and if we consider that, throughout Scripture, good and evil angels are represented as engaged in a struggle, a struggle for ascendancy over man, we must believe that the efforts of the one are met by precisely antagonist efforts on the part of the others, every mine having its countermine; so that if they who are against us labour to catch away the word, they who are for us labour to imprint it, to procure for it a hold and grasp upon the hearers.

And this gives something of a practical and tangible character to that high contest which is going forwards between "principalities and powers." We need not lose ourselves in endeavouring to imagine the shock of spiritual intelligences, meeting on some field of far-distant space, with all the emblazonry of celestial pomp, and in all the terribleness of super-human strength. It may be thus that poetry loves to dwell on the battles of angels; but theology has rather to do away with this martial magnificence, to carry the war into the narrow domain of a single human heart, and there to give it the character of a moral conflict, a struggle between principles, supported and pressed by the opposite parties which appear as combatants, and engage in the champion-

ship, whether of falsehood or truth. The very place of our present assembling is a scene for the hostile meeting of evil angels and good ; and there is not one of you who does not himself furnish a field for that strife between invisible powers, which Scriptural imagery invests with the mysteriousness that belongs to the vast and inscrutable. As the preacher sets before you your sinfulness, and, exhorting you to amendment, shows you the provision made by God for your pardon and acceptance, the words which he utters are just as weapons, on which the combatants labour to seize ; the evil angels that they may blunt and throw them away, the good that they may thrust them into the understanding, and the conscience, and the heart. But, then, let it never be overlooked that we are ourselves answerable for the issue of this struggle ; that neither good angels, nor evil, can carry their end, except so far as they have us for auxiliaries. It were of all things the easiest, to make the contest, of which we are the objects, an excuse for our remaining indifferent to the Gospel, pleading that it rested with those who professed to fight our cause, to gain for it admission into the recesses of the soul. But exactly as we are not to “grieve the Holy Spirit,” and, in proportion as we grieve Him, must expect his influences to be less powerfully put forth on our behalf, so are we to take heed to second good angels, who can but be instruments which the Holy Spirit employs ; and to expect that the Gospel will

lay hold on the heart, in proportion as we strive to clear away prejudice, and to receive it with docility and meekness.

And if you want proof how much may be lost through deficiency in that heedfulness which would aid good angels in their endeavours to give effect to the word, it is furnished by what we know of the women whom such angels address in the text. There could apparently have been nothing plainer than the preaching of our blessed Saviour, in regard of his own death and resurrection. He announced, in simple, unequivocal terms, that He should be crucified by his enemies, but that on the third day He would rise from the dead; and angels, as it now seems, were present to imprint his words on the minds of the hearers, to prevent their being carried away, as the seed is carried which falls by the way side. But the followers of the Redeemer had their minds pre-occupied by prejudices; they were still looking for a temporal deliverer, and could not tolerate the mention of an ignominious death, for they associated with it the overthrow of long-cherished hopes. Hence, there was no seconding of good angels, but rather a distinct taking part with evil; and consequently the words, which might have been remembered, and could not have been misunderstood, even by a child, appear to have been completely obliterated, so that the hearers remained with as little expectation of what was coming on their Lord, as though He had never forewarned them, or fore-

warned them only in dubious and mystical terms. When, therefore, the time of trial came, it virtually found them wholly unprepared; and the death of Jesus as actually demolished their hopes, as if He had not told them that it should be rapidly followed by his resurrection. The women, who, had they but remembered and believed, might have come to the sepulchre, rejoicing in the assurance that it could not long hold its prey, came weeping and disheartened, bringing with them spices to anoint the body which they supposed would remain an inmate of the grave. And it might well have made them shed tears over their own darkness and unbelief, even in the midst of their gladness at the triumph won over death, that the angels, in proving to them the resurrection, had only to adduce words which should have prevented their seeking "the living among the dead;" that they had simply to say to them, "Remember how he spake unto you, when he was yet with you in Galilee."

But now it should be more carefully observed, that this reminding the women of what had been said to them by Christ, is probably but an example of what continually occurs in the ministration of angels. The great object of our discourse is to illustrate this ministration, to give it something of a tangible character; and we gladly seize on the circumstance of the angels recalling to the minds of the women things which had been heard, because it seems to place under a practical point of view, what is too

generally considered mere useless speculation. And though we do not indeed look for any precise repetition of the scene given in our text, for angels do not now take visible shapes in order to commune with men, we know not why we should not ascribe to angelic ministration facts accurately similar, if not as palpably proceeding from supernatural agency. We think that we shall be borne out by the experience of every believer in Christ, when we affirm that texts of Scripture are often suddenly and mysteriously brought into the mind; texts which have not perhaps recently engaged our attention, but which are most nicely suited to our circumstances, or which furnish most precisely the material then needed by our wants. There will enter into the spirit of a Christian, on whom has fallen some unexpected temptation, a passage of the Bible which is just as a weapon wherewith to foil his assailant; or if it be an unlooked for difficulty into which he is plunged, the occurring verses will be those best adapted for counsel and guidance; or if it be some fearful trouble with which he is visited, then will there pass through all the chambers of the soul gracious declarations, which the inspired writers will seem to have uttered and registered on purpose for himself. And it may be that the Christian will observe nothing peculiar in this: there may appear to him nothing but an effort of memory, roused and acted on by the circumstances in which he is placed; and he may consider it as natural, that suitable passages should throng into

his mind, as that he should remember an event at the place where he knows it to have happened.

But let him ask himself whether he is not, on the other hand, often conscious of the intrusion into his soul of what is base and defiling? Whether, if he happen to have heard the jeer and the blasphemy, the parody on sacred things, or the insult upon moral, they will not be frequently recurring to his mind? recurring too at moments when there is least to provoke them, and when it had been most his endeavour to gather round him an atmosphere of what is sacred and pure. And we never scruple to give it as matter of consolation to a Christian, harassed by these vile invasions of his soul, that he may justly ascribe them to the agency of the devil: wicked angels inject into the mind the foul and polluting quotation; and there is not necessarily any sin in receiving it, though there must be if we give it entertainment, in place of casting it instantly out. But why should we be so ready to go for explanation to the power of memory, and the force of circumstances, when apposite texts occur to the mind, and then resolve into Satanic agency the profanation of the spirit with what is blasphemous and base? It were far more consistent to admit a spiritual influence in the one case as well as in the other; to suppose, that, if evil angels syllable to the soul what may have been heard or read of revolting and impure, good angels breathe into its recesses the sacred words, not perhaps recently perused, but which apply

most accurately to our existing condition. It is expressly said of the devil, that he is "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience," as though he not merely had access to their minds, but took up his abode there, that he might carry on, as in a citadel, the war and the stratagem. And if evil angels have such power over the thoughts of men for evil, it seems unreasonable to question that good angels have as great influence over them for good; that they too work in the children of obedience, and are mainly instrumental in calling up, and marshalling, those solemn processions of sacred remembrances, which pass, with silent tread, through the chambers of the spirit, and leave on them the impress of their pureness and power.

We do not wish to draw you away, in the least degree, from the truth, that "the eternal uncreated Spirit of God alone, the Holy Ghost, is the author of our sanctification, the infuser into us of the principle of divine life, and He only is able to overrule our wills, to penetrate the deepest secrets of our hearts, and to rectify our most inward faculties¹." But surely it does not infringe the office of the Holy Ghost, to suppose, with Bishop Bull, that "good angels may, and often do, as instruments of the Divine goodness, powerfully operate upon our fancies and imaginations, and thereby prompt us to pious thoughts, affections, and actions." They were angels, as you

¹ Bishop Bull.

will remember, which came and ministered to our Lord, after He had been exposed, in the wilderness, to extraordinary assaults from the devil. He had the Spirit without measure; but, nevertheless, as though to mark to us the agency which this Spirit is often pleased to employ, it was in and through angels that consolation was imparted; even as, in the dread hour of his last conflict with the powers of darkness, "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him." And with every admission of the abundant comfort contained in the truth, that a Divine person, even the Holy Ghost, is continually engaged with observing our course, and promoting our welfare, we cannot but feel that it makes this truth more tangible, or brings it more home to our perception, to suppose such beings as angels employed by the Holy Ghost to carry on his work. You know practically what comfort there is in the thought of its being in human form that the Second Person of the Trinity discharges the office of Intercessor: we should be quite lost in approaching Him, were it merely as God that He ministers above; but we are more at home, and we feel greatly assured, in having, so to speak, a created medium, through which to draw nigh.

And what is thus true of the work of intercession, carried on by the Second Person, is true also, in its measure, of the work of sanctification, which appertains specially to the Third. We can better apprehend this work, when we associate with it a created

though subordinate agency; and that, which might seem vague and indefinite, if referred wholly to one infinite and inapproachable Being, commends itself to us, both as actually going forward, and as beautifully fitted to our weakness and wants, when we know it effected, through the instrumentality of creatures higher indeed and far more glorious than ourselves, but nevertheless creatures who have themselves known what moral danger is, and who can therefore rejoice, with ineffable gladness, over one sinner who turns from the error of his ways. That I cannot see these angels, busying themselves with the work of my sanctification, is no more an argument against there being comfort in the fact, than is my not seeing the glorified humanity of Christ, against the encouragement which it gives as to the work of intercession. In both cases I believe that there is a something created, and therefore a something not too far removed from myself, which is engaged in ministrations for my good; and thus, in both cases, there has been a condescension to the weakness of my nature, and God may be said to have come near to me without the blaze of his celestial effulgence, that his terror might not make me afraid¹.

Not only therefore can I regard it as credible, that angels stir up our torpid memories, and bring truths to our recollection, as they did to the women at the sepulchre of Christ,—I can rejoice in it as fraught

¹ Job xxxiii. 7.

with consolation, because showing that a created instrumentality is used by the Holy Ghost in the renewing our nature. And surely it may well excite gladness, that there is around the Christian the guardianship of heavenly hosts; that, whilst his pathway is thronged by malignant spirits, whose only effort is to involve him in their everlasting shame, it is also thronged by ministers of grace, who long to have him as their companion in the presence of God; for there is thus what we might almost dare to call a visible array of power on our side, and we may take all that confidence which should result from being actually permitted to look on the antagonists, and to see that there are more with us than there are against. We will not debate whether other and satisfactory solutions may be given of the fact which has furnished our illustration of angelic ministration, but we doubt whether any can be more scriptural; and whilst it agrees so well with their general office, and is so fitted to strengthen us in our pilgrimage, we shall venture to regard angels as God's remembrancers to man. And they may talk to me of the tenacity of memory, and the force of circumstances—the tenacity of memory, which will often hardly serve us from day to day, but lets slip a hundred things which we longed to retain! the force of circumstances, which, ordinarily, save where there exists great presence of mind, bewilder and perplex, rather than suggest the fitting and appropriate! Yea, they may talk of the tenacity of memory, and

the force of circumstances, and think to explain from such elements that recurrence to the mind of suitable texts, that sudden resurrection of forgotten passages of Scripture, at the very moment when they apply with greatest accuracy, which every Christian is conscious of in himself, and which he will find exemplified in the experience of others. We have a better way of accounting for the phenomenon; a better, inasmuch as (were there nothing else to be said) it leaves to the aged the consolation of knowing that memory may decay, and yet the Bible not depart from their minds. And who has not seen this exhibited in the aged? The grey-headed Christian, when he has almost forgotten even the faces of friends, will yet familiarly quote the sayings of Scripture. We have then, we say, a better way of explaining the phenomenon. We ascribe it to the suggestings of those "ministering spirits," which wait on the "heirs of salvation," that texts and passages of Holy Writ come so mysteriously, but appropriately, into the mind. Oh, it is not the burning and beautiful imagery of poetry alone, which would people the air, and make it melodious with the voices of invisible beings. After all, there is more of real poetry in the facts of theology, than in the finest excursions of the human imagination. I believe, I do not fancy, that there are silent whisperings to the soul from spiritual creatures: the texts, which rise up so wonderfully, in the hour whether of temptation or of sorrow, as though made for the occasion, are actually the

utterances of guardian beings; and if there were more of a demonstration to the senses, than when passages occur to ourselves, I know not why we should think there was a more literal suggestion of truth to the mind, in the scene presented by our text, when angels, appearing as men, said to the women that were early at the sepulchre, "Remember how he spake unto you, when he was yet with you in Galilee."

But it is hardly possible to read these words of the angels, and not to feel how reproachfully they must have fallen on the ears of the women! how they must have upbraided them with want of attention and of faith! For had they but listened heedfully to what Christ had said, and had they but given due credence to his words, they would have come in triumph to welcome the living, in place of mournfully with spices to embalm the dead. If it ministered to them gladness, to be told that their Lord had risen, it must have occasioned them sorrow, to be reminded that He Himself had foretold his resurrection; so that their presence at the tomb, bearing what they meant to evidence their love, spake of nothing more deeply than of the neglect with which they had treated his words. It was well for these women that they were thus taught their inattention and unbelief, whilst it was not too late for repentance and confession. They might have been left to die in their forgetfulness; for there is nothing in their history to show that the strength of memory,

and the force of circumstances, would have brought Christ's words to their remembrance; on the contrary, the empty sepulchre, which you would have thought most likely to recall the words, had nothing but a bewildering effect; for you read, "they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, and they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus; and it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments." The circumstances were precisely those which might have been expected to suggest the long-neglected sayings, and thus cause the truth to flash upon the mind: yet you see, that had there not been the angelic interference, the women would have had no explanation to give of the disappearance of the body of their Lord. And they might have been left without this interference; suffered to die with Christ's words as witnesses against them, witnesses which would have proved them inexcusable in not knowing that Messiah was to be crucified for sin, but not suffered to see corruption in the grave.

But God dealt more graciously with these women than their inattention, or want of faith, had deserved; He caused the words to be brought to their remembrance, whilst they might yet inspire confidence, though they could hardly fail also to excite bitter contrition. It is often thus with ourselves; the appropriate text is made to recur to the mind; but, whilst we gather from it an abundance of comfort,

we are forced to reproach ourselves for having been cast down, or terrified, when God had put such truths upon record as should have left no place for anxiety or doubt. If Christ be wakened from his sleep, through our terror at the storm, He may not only rebuke the winds and the waves, but chide us at the same time as men "of little faith."

May it not, however, be, that, where there has been wilful inattention to the word, there will not always occur this angelic recalling of it to the mind? not, at least, whilst there is yet time for the laying it to heart? We dare not doubt this. And if the remembered words fall reproachfully on the ear, when we may yet make use of them for good, what, alas! shall it be if the words be then only recalled, when there shall no longer be "place for repentance?" Our blessed Saviour Himself, speaking of what shall be the process of judgment at the last dreadful day, makes his word the great accuser of all such as reject him. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." And when with this you connect the part which angels are to take in the awful assize on the whole race of man; for we read that "the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just;" that "the Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire;"—O ter-

rible thought, that the very beings who now watch us as friends, good angels, not evil, shall bind up the offending, and cast them into Hell!—when, we say, you connect what Christ says of his word, with what He elsewhere says of angels; the word, the condemning thing at the judgment, the angels, the ministers of vengeance; you can hardly question that the office, which celestial beings performed towards the women at the resurrection of Christ, is one which they will yet perform towards multitudes, when the earth and the sea shall have given up their dead. Is it the sensualist who is being carried away into outer darkness? and wherefore is he speechless? The attendant angel hath said, “Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet with you upon earth; Neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor drunkards, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” It is the word which judges him, and it is the angel which binds him. Is it the covetous on whom has been passed a sentence against which he has nothing to urge? The angel hath said, “Remember how he spake unto you, Covetousness, which is idolatry.” Is it the proud? “Remember how he spake unto you, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the lowly.” Is it the careless and the indifferent? “Remember how he spake unto you, What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Is it the procrastinator, who had deferred the season of repentance? “Remember how he spake unto you, Behold,

now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

In each and every case, the word may judge, and the angels may bind. O that this were well laid to heart by all in the present assembly ! We venture to say, that it happens to all of you to have passages of Scripture powerfully brought home to the mind—you know not by what agency, and you cannot, perhaps, account for the sudden intrusion—but there they are ; passages which would dissuade you from some pursuit on which you are tempted to enter, or urge you to some duty which you are tempted to neglect. It is the voice of a guardian spirit, that spirit, perhaps, which, in holy baptism, was specially appointed to attend your course, which you should consider that you hear in these whispered passages. Harken ye diligently to this silent voice. Ye resist the Holy Ghost when ye resist the angel that would thus, by adducing Scripture, rebuke you, as the women were rebuked, for seeking “ the living amongst the dead,” the food of the soul amid the objects of sense. If, when secretly reminded of the truth, ye will give heed, and act forthwith on the suggested lesson—whether it prompt to prayer, or to resistance, or to self-denial, or to amendment—we can promise you such assistance from above as shall carry you on towards the kingdom of Heaven. But if ye refuse, and turn a deaf ear, alas ! alas ! the voice may never again be heard on this side the grave. Yet the

words have not perished ; the words cannot perish : again, again, shall they find a voice, but a voice which will be burdened with condemnation ; for thus shall it introduce at the judgment the long-neglected sayings, “ Remember how he spake unto you, whilst he was yet with you upon earth.”

S E R M O N III.

THE BURNING OF THE MAGICAL BOOKS.

ACTS xix. 19.

“ Many of them also which used curious arts, brought their books together, and burned them before all men : and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

THIS occurred at Ephesus, a celebrated city of Asia Minor, which contained that magnificent temple of Diana, which was reckoned amongst the wonders of the world. The Ephesians, it appears, were greatly addicted to the study of curious arts, to magic, sorcery, and judicial astrology, so that “ Ephesian letters ” became a proverbial expression for cabalistic, or magical, characters. The Gospel, as preached by St. Paul, made great way in Ephesus, and a very flourishing church rewarded his labours. The Ephesians, according to the common course of the Divine dealings, were attacked in the way which their habits

and pursuits marked out as most promising. In no place does there seem to have been so great a display of supernatural energy; as though men, much addicted to witchcraft, to the attempting unlawful intercourse with potent but invisible beings, were likely to be most wrought upon by evidence of intimate connection with spiritual agents. You read that "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul, so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs, or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them."

It must have been very striking to the Ephesian magicians, to find that St. Paul could thus apparently communicate a sort of magical virtue to articles of dress: they were perhaps more likely than men who had never meddled with occult arts, to feel the force of such an evidence of superhuman might. In short, the Ephesians, because accustomed to produce strange results by some species or another of witchcraft, would naturally ascribe miracles to a similar agency; hence, the miracles, which were to serve as their credentials of Christianity, required to be more than commonly potent, such as were not in any degree imitable, whether through the dexterity of the juggler, or the incantations of the sorcerer. And it seems to us one of those instances, not the less remarkable because easily overlooked, of the carefulness with which God adapts means to an end, that, in a city in which, of all others, false miracles

were likely to abound, and improper arts made the mind familiar with strange phenomena, the powers granted to the preachers of Christianity were of extraordinary extent, sufficing to place an Apostle at an immeasurable distance from the most consummate magician.

It is, moreover, evident that the hold gained on the Ephesians was gained by and through the demonstration of the superiority of St. Paul's power to that possessed by any dealer in unlawful arts. In the verses which immediately precede our text, you have the account of a singular occurrence, which appears to have had much to do with the obtaining for Christianity a firm footing in Ephesus. You read that certain Jews, who travelled the country as exorcists, persons, that is, who professed to cast out the evil spirits which had then frequent possession of men's bodies, took upon them to employ the name of the Lord Jesus in their endeavours to eject demons, having observed with what success it was used by St. Paul. Amongst others who made the wicked and insolent attempt, for such it surely was, to endeavour to weave a spell from a name which they openly blasphemed, were the "seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew." As though they thought that numbers would give force to the adjuration, these seven appear to have gone together to a man demoniacally possessed, and to have addressed the foul spirit in the name of Jesus Christ. The spirit, however, answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who

are ye?" Thus the demon professed himself ready to submit to Jesus, or Paul, his accredited messenger; but he knew of no right which these exorcists had to dispossess him by the name whose potency he acknowledged. He was not, however, content with thus refusing to be exorcised: he took a signal revenge, causing the man, in whom he dwelt, to put forth supernatural strength, so that he leaped upon the seven men, and overcame them, and forced them to flee "out of the house naked and wounded."

This was quickly noised abroad, and produced, we are told, great effects among both the Jews and Greeks who were dwelling at Ephesus; "and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." To men accustomed to make use of charms and incantations, the evidence thus given of the sacredness of Christ's name, and of the peril of employing it to any but those who believed in his mission, would naturally be very convincing: it was just the sort of evidence which their habits made them most capable of appreciating, and by which therefore they were most likely to be overcome. Accordingly, it seems at once to have taught numbers the necessity of submitting to Christ, and renouncing those arts of magic and sorcery, through which they had perhaps endeavoured to hold intercourse with spirits. They acted with great promptness on the conviction: they laid open all the mysteries of their witchcraft, they "came, and confessed, and showed their deeds;" and then, fired with a holy

indignation at the nefarious practices in which they had long indulged, and abhorring the very books which contained the rules and secrets of their arts, they gathered together the curious and costly volumes, and publicly burned them; thus evidencing their sincerity by no trifling sacrifice, for when they counted the price of these books, "they found it fifty thousand pieces of silver."

Now there are certain points of view, under which if this conduct of the Ephesians be surveyed, it will appear singularly deserving of being both admired and imitated. We believe of this incident of the burning of the magical books, as of the rest of scriptural history, that it has been "written for our admonition," and ought not to be passed over with a mere cursory notice. We shall accordingly proceed to the endeavouring to extract from it such lessons as there shall seem ground for supposing it intended to furnish.

It is unnecessary for us to inquire what those arts may have been, in which the Ephesians are said to have greatly excelled. There seems no reason for doubting, that, as we have stated already, they were of the nature of magic, sorcery, or witchcraft; though we cannot profess accurately to define what such terms might import. The Ephesians, as some in all ages have done, probably laid claim to intercourse with invisible beings, and professed to derive from that intercourse acquaintance with, and power over, future events. And though the very name of witch-

craft be now held in contempt, and the supposition of communion with evil spirits scouted as a fable of what are called the dark ages, we own that we have difficulty in believing, that all which has passed by the names of magic and sorcery may be resolved into sleight of hand, deception, and trick. The visible world and the invisible are in very close contact : there is indeed a veil on our eyes, preventing our gazing on spiritual beings and things ; but we doubt not that whatsoever passes upon earth is open to the view of higher and immaterial creatures. And as we are sure that a man of piety and prayer enlists good angels on his side, and engages them to perform towards him the ministrations of kindness, we know not why there cannot be such a thing as a man, whose wickedness has caused his being abandoned by the Spirit of God, and who, in this his desertion, has thrown open to evil angels the chambers of his soul, and made himself so completely their instrument, that they may use him in the uttering or working strange things, which shall have all the air of prophecy or miracle.

But whatever your opinion be as to the precise nature of sorcery, and the degree to which it might be carried, we may be sure that the books, which the Ephesian converts so resolutely burnt, contained the mysteries of the art, the rules by whose study and application men were to acquire what, at least, might resemble superhuman power and skill. And what

we have first to remark on the burning of these books, is, that it manifested great detestation of their contents, though hitherto the Ephesians had specially delighted in reading and applying them. There could have been no stronger evidence of the reality of their conversion, than was given by their committing these volumes to the flames. They thus showed a thorough consciousness of the unlawfulness of the arts of which the books treated, and an abhorrence of the practices therein described. And it is always a great sign of the genuineness, the sincerity, of religion, when a man proves that the things, in which he once took delight, are regarded by him with hatred and aversion. It is given as the characteristic of vital Christianity, that he, in whom it dwells, has become "a new creature." There is nothing which may take the place of this characteristic, or make up for its want. It matters not whether a man can describe the process of his conversion, or fix its exact date: he may have been truly converted, and yet be ignorant how and when it was done. But it is quite indispensable that there should be evidences of moral renewal: light and darkness are not more opposed than the state of the converted and that of the unconverted; and though I may not know the moment or manner of my being translated from the one to the other, there is more than room for doubting whether I can have been translated at all, if no change have perceptibly passed on my hopes, desires, and fears. Regenerated

in baptism, I may indeed have been “daily renewed¹,” and never, therefore, have needed conversion. But if I have ever lived a worldly life, and then hearkened to the dictates of religion, the transition may have been silently and imperceptibly effected, but must be demonstrable from strong contrasts between what I am and what I once was.

We have always therefore to require of men, who, once worldly, now think themselves converted, that they rest content with no evidence but that of a great moral change; not satisfied, because there may have been something of external reform, but searching for proof of such alteration in character, that they hate what they loved, and love what they hated. Such a proof the Ephesians gave, when they burnt their costly treatises on magic. They had been specially addicted to magic: by and through magic they had specially offended God, and perilled their souls: so soon, therefore, as Christianity had won its way to their hearts, it was against magic that they showed a holy indignation; it was magic which they proved themselves resolved to abandon. The moral change was thus satisfactorily evidenced; the thing which had been most delighted in was the thing most abhorred; and no proof could be stronger, that the men were new creatures in Christ.

We ask the like proof from those of you who suppose themselves “renewed in the spirit of their

¹ Collect for Christmas-day.

mind." Have you burnt your books on magic? We do not accuse you of having, like the Ephesians, practised the arts of the sorcerer: ye have not woven spells, nor muttered incantations. Ye have had nothing to do with the mysteries of enchantment, or with the foul rites of necromancy, dazzling the living, or disturbing the dead. But, nevertheless, ye have been in communion with "the god of this world," "the prince of the power of the air:" ye have submitted to his illusions, and surrendered yourselves to his service. If, in some peculiar sense, the sorcerer or the magician give himself up to the devil, and make himself his instrument, there is a broader sense in which every one of us by nature holds intercourse with fallen angels, and learns from them how to put deceits on others and himself. Yea, and we have our books upon magic. What are half the volumes with which the land is deluged, but volumes which can teach nothing but how to serve the devil better? How numerous the works of an infidel tendency! How yet more numerous those of an immoral! What a shoal of poems and tales, which, though not justly falling under either of these descriptions, can but emasculate the mind of the reader, filling it with fancies and follies, and unfitting it for high thought and solemn investigation. What treatises on the acquisition of wealth, as though money were the one thing needful; what histories of the ambitious and daring, as though human honour deserved our chief aspirations; what pictures of plea-

sure, as though earthly gratifications could satisfy our longings.

And if we have our books upon magic, have we not also the scenes and places where fallen spirits may be declared the presiding deities?—the crowded mart, where mammon is almost literally worshipped; the gorgeous theatre, where the very air is that of voluptuousness; the more secret haunts of licentiousness; the mirthful gatherings, where the great object is to forget God; the philosophical, where the chief endeavour is to extol man. Indeed it must not be said that there is nothing of witchcraft going on around us. The question of the Apostle to the Galatians has lost none of its force: “Who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth?” Nay, not only may every unconverted man be declared, in some great sense, under the influence of sorcery: he may be said to practise sorcery; for he is instrumental, whether by his precept or his example, to the seducing others into sin, and confirming their attachment to the world.

We may, then, almost literally bring him, if he think himself converted, to the test furnished by the conflagration of which we read in our text. We ask him whether he feels, and manifests, a righteous indignation against those practices and pursuits which at one time engrossed his affections? Whatever may have been his peculiar and besetting sin, is it that sin against which he specially guards? is it that sin which he visits with the most thorough hatred? It is

comparatively nothing that he is vigilant and wrathful against other sins—is he vigilant and wrathful against the favourite sin? The Ephesians directed their indignation against magic; and it was magic to which the Ephesians had been specially prone. Have we proceeded on the same principle? One man is specially acted on by the love of wealth: is it the love of wealth against which religion has made him specially earnest? Another is more disposed to the pursuit of honour: is it ambition against which religion has most roused his zeal? A third is most easily overcome by his bodily appetites: is it his grand effort, as instructed by Christianity, to crucify “the flesh, with the affections and lusts?” We can take no lesser proof of sincerity: the fire must be made with the books of our own particular art, otherwise we may burn library upon library, and yet furnish no evidence of conversion.

And in this respect, even had we no other to allege, the conduct of the Ephesians reads a great lesson to the men of every age. They publicly showed that they hated and abjured the sin which they were publicly known to have most loved and practised. It was the vehement protest of the covetous man against covetousness; of the licentious against licentiousness; of the ambitious against ambition. It was not the protest of the covetous against licentiousness; nor of the licentious against ambition. There is ordinarily little difficulty in gaining such a protest as that. But it was the pro-

test of the awakened sinner against his own chosen form of sin; and thousands are ready to protest against all but their own, to give up any other, on the single condition of keeping what they love best. Therefore, judge ye yourselves, we again say, by your likeness to the Ephesians. Ye have tampered, in one sense, like them, with sorcery. Ye have gone down to the cave of the enchantress, and ye have drunk of that cup by which the tempter hopes to steal away men's faculties. Ye have had your books in which ye have studied magic—whether the magic by which the metal and the jewel may be made to flow into your coffers; or that by which ye may wreath the brow with laurel; or that by which ye may fascinate the senses, and make life one round of luxurious enjoyment. But ye now think that religion has hold upon you, and that ye are no longer what ye were. And heartily do we trust that ye are right in your opinion; and that there is no self-deceit. But this we must tell you—if ye be, indeed, converted, the evidence of the conversion will be in the manifested abhorrence, not only generally of sin, but especially of that sin in which you most indulged—oh, you will virtually do what was done by the Ephesians, who, because they had peculiarly provoked God by the practising curious arts, were no sooner led to a true belief in Christ, than they “brought their books together, and burned them before all men.”

It would, however, be inferring comparatively very

little from this action of the Ephesians, were we to regard it only as expressing their detestation of their favourite sin. We may justly suppose that they had their safety in view, when throwing into the flames the treatises on magic. They might have publicly renounced the arts which they had been accustomed to practise, without burning the rare volumes which had initiated them into their mysteries. They might have shut up these volumes, retaining them as mere literary curiosities, though resolving never again to refer to them for instruction in witchcraft. But there would have been a want of Christian prudence in this; this would have kept them continually exposed to temptation; and it was in their not doing this, that we count them greatly worthy of being admired and imitated. It is very clear that, had they not destroyed their treatises on magic, there would always have been a risk of their returning to their study: it was not unlikely that, so soon as the first heat of religion had passed, they would again have taken up the curious books, and read them for recreation, if not for instruction. We do not necessarily suppose that they would have turned to them with any design of resuming unlawful practices; but they might have perused them as a singular species of literature, from which entertainment might be drawn, without any surrender of the persuasion that they taught only what was foul and unhallowed.

Yet any such intention of making any use what-

ever of the books would have shown a sort of lurking affection for what they contained, and could not, at least, have been carried into effect without risk of the being seduced back into the practice of sorcery. The Ephesians, therefore, wisely determined to put themselves out of the way of temptation; and this, you observe, they effectually did by burning their books; for, in all probability, those books were not to be replaced, even had they wished for them again; there was then no printing-press, that mighty engine for multiplying evil as well as good. Thus they cut themselves off, in a very high degree, from the possibility of returning to their divinations and enchantments: they showed a wholesome distrust of their own strength and resolution, and proved that, with real Christian prudence, they thought it better to shun than to brave moral peril.

And herein did they become a great example to ourselves. We have to require of those of you who have broken away from the enchantments and fascinations of the world, that they show a like zeal in avoiding the scenes and occasions of temptation. It is not Christian courage, it is nothing better than presumption, when a man unnecessarily exposes himself to spiritual danger, as though counting himself proof against assault, and not again to be entangled in things once abandoned. When we are brought into temptation, by walking the clear path of duty, we have the best reason to expect such assistance from above as shall enable us to hold fast our inte-

grity. But if we be not in the clear path of duty when we meet the temptation; if it be through our own choice, or hardihood, that our constancy is endangered; there is great probability that God will suffer us to fall, if only to teach us our feebleness, and our need of stronger caution for the future. God permitted not the fire to singe a hair of the heads of the three Jewish youths, who preferred the being cast into a furnace to the worshipping an idol; but had they presumptuously thrown themselves into the flames, in place of having been enveloped in them for the maintenance of truth, do you think that the like miracle would have been wrought on their behalf? And similarly with the Ephesians, it might happen to them, that books on magic would fall in their way, and that they would be tempted to peruse their unhallowed pages. But they would have had nothing to do with the causing this temptation, and might, therefore, expect to be strengthened to withstand it. But if, on the other hand, they had kept themselves in the way of temptation by preserving the treatises, they would have had only themselves to blame, if, as in all likelihood it would have happened, they had been drawn back to the study, and perhaps even the practice, of unlawful arts.

Here, therefore, we have again to ply the professing Christians amongst you with the question, have ye burnt your books on magic? Ye will readily understand the precise force of the question, as addressed to yourselves, and how it must be modified

to meet a difference in circumstances. As we before said, ye have had nothing to do with the arts of the sorcerer, in the sense in which those arts were practised by the Ephesians. But nevertheless ye have lived in a very atmosphere of witchery; the spell has been woven over you and around you; the gorgeous phantoms, the brilliant shadows, with which evil spirits people the world, "beguiling unstable souls," these once dazzled and allured you, though now the illusion is broken, and ye have resolved to walk henceforwards by the light of God's word. And what have ye done in regard of sources and occasions of temptation? upon what principle have you acted with respect to books, and scenes, and practices, which experience has identified with the artifices of that great deceiver, who once had you altogether in his power? It may be that one of you was half inclined to infidelity: he read sceptical books, whose assertions he could not disprove, and whose sophistries he could not unravel—he was magician enough to conjure up doubts, but wanted the wand of truth wherewith to disperse them. Christianity, however, has been presented to him with that overcoming evidence which it wears, when preached with "demonstration of the Spirit and of power;" and he has put away all unbelief, and cordially admitted the Gospel as a message from God. But what has he done with the magical books, with the treatises which entangled him in the maze of infidelity? There is such a thing as preserving, yea, as reading a book

from a literary motive, when it is held in abhorrence on every other account. The book may be very rare, or very eloquent; it may be valuable for its style, or for information which it contains, though unhappily fraught with Deistical principles. And the man, on whom the book once acted like an initiation into sorcery, forcing him into a region of wild cloud and shadow, will, perhaps, when he has shaken off scepticism, study the book afresh, because relishing its beauty of diction, or wishing to show himself proof against its falsehoods. Ah! he had better have imitated the Ephesians: he is fearfully and unnecessarily endangering his faith: he should rather have burnt the book on magic; he should have done, we mean, his best to put, or to keep, the dangerous volume out of reach.

It may be that another of you has lived much in vice, submitting himself to the tyranny of his passions, and walking within the circles of what is falsely called pleasure. And in this his sensual career he has, perhaps, been often excited to fresh indulgence by the licentious writings of poets, men who have prostituted all the graces of song to the service of impurity. It is one of the foulest and most melancholy of facts, that writers of extraordinary genius, not to be surpassed in the play of imagination, and the power of language, have desecrated their talents to the adorning debauchery, to the throwing a grace and a beauty over the abominations of vice. And it must be a fatal and a standing

reproach on our literature, that it contains volumes which are almost unrivalled in the mere article of composition, rich in the splendour of diction, the brilliancy of metaphor, and the pathos of description, but which put all modesty to the blush, and but few fragments of which can we venture to place in the hands of our children. These deserve to be called the treatises on magic, when it is the wand of pleasure which evil spirits wave. It is beyond calculation what an amount of viciousness is fostered in a land, through the circulation of loose, but beautiful, poetry. We speak not of publications which can be only sold in secret, and the venders of which have only to become known to be punished by law. We speak of those to which no such open stigma is attached, but which are, nevertheless, as instrumental to the fanning base passions, and encouraging licentiousness, as the more indecent and scandalous, which draw upon themselves judicial condemnation. There is many a young person who would shrink from gross writings with a sort of instinctive abhorrence, but who is not proof against the seductions of voluptuous poetry, and to whom, therefore, the elegant author, who can clothe immorality in a fascinating dress, will serve as a sort of High Priest of vice, though he might have been disgusted by any of its less polished ministers.

But our question now is, what does the sensualist do with the magical books, when convinced, by the urgency of Christianity, of the duty of living

“soberly, righteously, and godly in the world?” Is there not much, even amongst those who profess an utter abhorrence of licentiousness, of retaining, and reading, for the sake of their exquisite poetry, works confessedly immoral in their tendency? Are not the graces of composition accepted in apology for the deficiencies in principle? Does not many a man tolerate, yea, even enjoy, books which, in a religious point of view, he utterly repudiates, because they contain passages of unexampled sublimity, or flash throughout with the coruscations of genius? We have only to say upon this, that the Ephesians acted more nobly, and more wisely. The man, who has once been the slave of his passions, and who has found those passions excited by voluptuous writings, ought never again to open the volumes, as though he might now gather the beauties of poesy without imbibing the sentiments of impurity: the volumes ought to be to him, as if the only copies had been consumed in the flames—the Ephesians should be his pattern, who not merely abjured what they had learnt to be wrong, but did their utmost to keep themselves out of reach, for the future, of the temptations by which they had been overcome

And, without confining ourselves to the precise case of books, what is your course generally in regard of occasions of sin, of places and occupations which you have found detrimental to religion? Do you make a point of shunning what you have discovered

to be injurious? or do you venture on a repetition, in the confidence of being too strong to be again injured? The associates who encouraged you in sin, whilst careless of the soul—have you given them up, now that you are anxious for the soul? or do you act on the supposition, that there is no further fear of your being carried away by the force of companionship? You found that worldly amusements—the theatre, with its licentious accompaniments; the masquerade and the dance, with their frivolity, at least, if not their sinfulness; the card-table, with its trial of temper, even where it did not excite the spirit of gambling—you found that these warred against the soul, whilst you were yet unconverted; but what have you done as a proof and result of conversion? Have you striven, to the best of your power, to place barriers between yourselves and these amusements? or are you still partaking of them, only in less measure, and with a diminished affection?

Or, once more, if it were for wealth that you had dealings with the sorcerer, dedicating every moment and energy to the arts by which gold may be multiplied, how have you acted since the grace of God, as you think, brought you to love and seek everlasting treasures? Have you put from you what was too engrossing in occupation? or are you still as engaged as ever in the witchcraft of money-making?

You can hardly fail to understand the drift of these questions. The thing which we wish impressed upon you is, that, whatever may have been your

dominant passion before conversion, your great effort, in proof of conversion, should be the cutting yourselves off from temptations to the gratifying that passion. We care not what enchantment you most practised, or by what you were most beguiled; your endeavour should be, to keep yourselves as much as possible out of the sphere of that enchantment; not exposing yourselves to its influence, as though its power were gone, but placing yourselves beyond its reach, as though your weakness remained. And if ever we see a man, who has been delivered from the meshes of infidelity, still fond of studying sceptical writings; or another, who has been won from licentiousness, adventuring into the haunts of dissipation; or a third, whose idol was gold, taking no pains to withdraw from the atmosphere of covetousness; or a fourth, whom evil companions had seduced, braving the charm of old association—oh, we cannot but greatly fear for such a man, that his contempt of danger will make him its victim; that, by not detaching himself at once from occasions and scenes of temptation, he has but insured relapses and backslidings: we can but desire that he had taken the Ephesians as his model, who no sooner renounced magic, than, as though fearful of being again entangled in its study, and distrusting themselves whilst they had access to its rules, “brought their books together, and burned them before all men.”

But there is yet another point of view under which we may survey the conduct of the Ephesians, and find

in it a test of the genuineness of conversion. We have spoken of the burning of the magical books as proving detestation of a favourite sin, and earnestness in avoiding the being again tempted to its commission. But we may allow that other ways might have been found in which to express abhorrence of sorcery; and that, perhaps, some of the Ephesians might have retained the books in their possession, without much risk of resuming the unlawful studies. Yet, if equal detestation might have been otherwise shown, and if no personal risk whatsoever had been run, we should still have to applaud, and point out for imitation, that action of the Ephesians which stands recorded in our text. So long as the books were preserved, there was of course no security against their falling into the hands of unstable persons, who would be tempted by them to the engaging in the trade of the magician. But by actually destroying the books, the most effectual means were taken to prevent the spread of the study of sorcery; for, as we have already remarked, there was then no printing-press to multiply indefinitely the copies of a work. The books must have been manuscripts, produced with great care, and procured at large cost. In our own day, indeed, very little would in most cases be gained by the burning our copy of an improper book. We should not thereby necessarily do much, if any thing, towards preventing the work from finding its way into the possession of others. But it was very different, as you must all perceive, before the invention

of printing ; and it is highly probable that the Christian converts could have done nothing more instrumental to the suppression of magic in Ephesus, than the consigning to the flames the books on curious arts which they respectively owned. It was going far towards destroying the grammars and dictionaries of the cabalistic language, and thus leaving those, who might wish to learn witchcraft, deprived of the common means of ascertaining its elements. And we suppose, accordingly, that the Ephesians were greatly actuated by this motive: it was not enough for them, either that they had themselves abjured magic, or were not themselves likely to be again injured by the books: they had respect to the welfare of others; and, feeling that this welfare might be endangered by the magical volumes, they threw without reserve those volumes into the flames, though their price, when counted, was found to be “fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

And here we have again to declare the Ephesians an example, and to ply you with the question, Have you, from the like motive, burnt your books on magic? There is no better test of the genuineness of conversion, than earnestness in seeking the conversion of others. It cannot be that a man has been brought to a sense of his sinfulness, of the danger to which as a sinner he is exposed, and of the provision made by Christ for his deliverance, and yet is indifferent to the condition of those who live “without hope, and without God in the world.” There is the

widest possible separation between vital Christianity and whatsoever has alliance with selfishness: vital Christianity is a generous, expansive thing: the man of the world may be willing to keep earthly riches to himself; the man of God must be anxious to communicate heavenly to others. In spiritual things, anxiety does not terminate with the securing our own safety: it is rapidly transferred to others; and when humbly confident of being "begotten again to a lively hope," we shall be painfully solicitous to make those around us fellow-heirs of the promise. One of the strongest feelings in the converted man, is that the great things done for him by God bind him to attempt great things in return: as he looks upon those who still sit "in darkness and the shadow of death," the light, with which he has been visited, will seem to him given on purpose to be diffused.

The Ephesians, as we think, quite satisfied this test of conversion, when they burnt their magical books. It was the action by which, as we have shown you, more was done than could perhaps have else been achieved, towards preventing others from engaging in practices which themselves had found most pernicious. So that the flames, in which they consumed their treatises on witchcraft, were the best tokens of the ardency of their love for the souls of their fellow men. Have you given any thing of a like token? Where are your books upon magic? What have you done towards keeping others from the sins to whose commission you were yourselves

most addicted? For what has been most injurious to yourselves, you will naturally feel likely to be most injurious to others, and it will therefore be that against which you will most strive to put others on their guard. The man, once tinctured with infidelity, will be zealous in suppressing sceptical writings, and diffusing their refutation. The man who has lived in licentiousness, will be so earnest in nothing as in discountenancing vice, and promoting morality. The man who was injured by bad company, will do all in his power to keep the unwary from evil associations. The man who has experienced the hurtfulness of public amusements, will be urgent against places and diversions which he found full of peril. The man who was likely to have been ruined through covetousness, will warn others, above all things, against the love of money. And in these or similar cases, the thing done is precisely what was done by the Ephesians: the books on magic are burnt, with the distinct view of keeping others from practising magic: individuals do their best to put down or obstruct that particular form of evil which proved most entangling and detrimental to themselves.

Let those of you who think themselves converted, try by this test the genuineness of their conversion. Each must well know the sin to which he was most inclined, and by which his salvation was most endangered; is he, then, all anxiety to keep others from that sin, and to remove from them temptations to its commission? The converted man is not only

desirous to prevent sin in general; he is specially desirous to prevent that sin which was once his besetting sin; to guard men against it, and to cut off its occasions. This is what we call burning the books on magic—the acting with the set design of withholding others from what has been peculiarly hurtful to ourselves. And if the man who was injured by sceptical writings manifest no special zeal against infidelity; or if he, who was in bondage to the lusts of the flesh, be not foremost in opposing licentiousness; or if another, who had almost shipwrecked himself for eternity in the theatre, or at the gaming-table, be not energetic in withdrawing others from haunts of dissipation; or generally, if an individual, who was all but lost through living in a certain sin, take no earnest measures for preventing those around him from committing that sin; oh, we are bound to fear for such a man, that he does but deceive himself, when thinking that he has undergone a great moral change; and we must urge upon him the comparing himself with the Ephesians of old, who were no sooner brought to faith in the Saviour than, animated with desire to suppress the arts which had endangered their souls, they collected their books, and threw them into the flames, though, when the price of them was counted, “they found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

Our concluding remarks on the burning the treatises on sorcery, will be of a somewhat different tex-

ture from the foregoing. The epistle which St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians about four years after this event, is among the most beautiful and valuable portions of the New Testament¹. It is not, as is the Epistle to the Romans, or that to the Hebrews, a great controversial treatise; it is a letter to those who, having been well initiated into Christianity, and grounded in its fundamental principles, might be conducted to its more secret depths, or admitted into acquaintance with its profounder mysteries. There is, perhaps, no part of the writings of St. Paul, in which the elements of Christian truth are more assumed as placed beyond controversy, and in which, therefore, the Apostle seems to feel more at liberty to descant on sublime things, and unfold glorious wonders. If it be lawful, in speaking of Scripture, to draw such a distinction, we should say that the Epistle to the Ephesians is among the most spiritual of the inspired writings, throwing open, in an uncommon degree, the very recesses of the Gospel, and presenting such heights of Christian doctrine as, after all our soarings, still lose themselves in the clouds.

And it has been justly pointed out, as singularly worthy of observation, that it was to men who had burnt their books on curious arts that an epistle was indited, so replete with what is most wonderful, most

¹ Knox's Correspondence.

beautiful, most profound, in Christianity. If you will allow us the expression, it was like repaying them in kind. The Ephesians had abandoned the mysteries of sorcery and astrology : at the bidding of the Apostle they had renounced unhallowed modes of prying into the secrets of the invisible world ; and they were recompensed by being led to the innermost shrines of truth, and permitted to behold glories which were veiled from common gaze. They gave up the astrology, which is busied with stars that shall be quenched, and lo, “ the Sun of righteousness ” rose on them with extraordinary effulgence ; they renounced the magic which would conjure up strange forms, and a rod, like that of Moses, was stretched forth, peopling the whole universe with images of splendour ; they abjured the necromancy, which sought to extort from the dead revelations of the future, and the very grave became luminous, and its ashes glowed for them with immortality.

Learn ye from this, that ye cannot give up any thing for God, and be losers by the surrender. The loss is always far more than made up, and, perhaps, often by the communication of something which resembles, whilst it immeasurably excels, what you part with. Never stay, then, to compute the cost : the Ephesians do not seem to have computed it before they burnt their books, though they computed it after—and then, not in regret, but only to display the triumph of the Gospel. Let the cost be “ fifty thousand pieces of silver : ” hesitate not to make the

sacrifice for God, and you shall find yourselves a hundred-fold recompensed: like the Ephesians, if you forsake magic, because God hath forbidden it, ye shall be initiated into mysteries which the Holy Spirit alone can reveal.

S E R M O N I V .

THE PARTING HYMN.

MATTHEW XXVI. 30.

“And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.”

THESE words refer, as you are probably all aware, to the conclusion of our Lord's last supper with his disciples, when, having instituted a sacrament which was to take the place of the Passover, he went forth to meet the sufferings through which the world should be redeemed. The Evangelist, St. John, does not give any account of the institution of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, but he records sundry most important discourses which Christ delivered at this time to his afflicted disciples. It is probable that a portion of these discourses was uttered immediately after the institution of the Sacrament, and before our Lord quitted the chamber in which He had supped with his followers. The remainder are

generally thought to have been delivered on the Mount of Olives, to which Christ first went, as is stated in our text, and from which, as the night advanced, He retired with Peter, and James, and John, to Gethsemane, that he might undergo mysterious agony, and meet in dread conflict the powers of darkness. But, to whatever times and places we may affix the several discourses preserved by St. John, there is every reason to think that our text relates the last thing which occurred in the room where the supper had been eaten ; that, so soon as the hymn, or psalm had been sung, our Lord left the room, that He might give Himself to the enemies who thirsted for his blood. Opportunity may have been afterwards found of fortifying still further the minds of the disciples ; but we are to consider that the singing of the hymn was the last thing done at Christ's last supper, and that, this having been done, the blessed Redeemer, as one who knew that his hour was come, forthwith departed to suffer and to die.

And what was the hymn, or psalm, chaunted at so fearful and melancholy a moment ? There is no reason to think that our Lord swerved from the custom of the Jews ; He had commemorated the Passover as it was then wont to be commemorated by his countrymen ; and we may justly, therefore, conclude that He sung what they were used to sing in finishing the solemn celebration. When the Passover was instituted, on the eventful night of the destruction of the first-born of the Egyptians,

various forms and practices were enjoined, as you find related in the twelfth chapter of the book of Exodus. But in after-times, especially in those of our Saviour, when traditions had come to their height, numerous circumstances were added to the celebration, so that the original rites formed but a small part of what were practised by the Jews¹. And learned men have well observed that the New Testament, in several places, refers to certain of these additional circumstances, leaving us to infer that Christ commemorated the Passover as it was then ordinarily commemorated, without rejecting such customs as could not distinctly plead the authority of the law. Thus, for example, at the first Passover in Egypt, the strict injunction had been, that they should eat it “with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, their staves in their hands, and in haste.” The posture enjoined and practised corresponded accurately with their condition, that of men about to be thrust forth from the country, and to enter on a toilsome and difficult march. But afterwards the Jews altered the posture, that it might answer better to their altered circumstances. At their common meals the Jews either sat, as we do, with their bodies erect, or reclined on couches, with the left elbow on the table. But on the Passover night they considered themselves obliged to use the recumbent position, because it marked, as they thought, their

¹ See Lightfoot on the celebration of the Passover.

freedom and composure. Now it is evident, that in this our Lord conformed to the custom of the Jews: the beloved disciple, John, leant on his bosom during the repast, from which we infer, at once, that Christ and his Apostles reclined in the eating the Passover.

To give another instance. The eating of unleavened bread at this time was enjoined by a special and express command, which you find in the Book of Exodus; but nothing is there said as to the use of wine at the Passover. Subsequently, however, the drinking wine at the Passover came to be considered as indispensable as the eating the unleavened bread. We find it expressly stated by the Rabbinical writers, that "the poorest man in Israel was bound to drink off four cups of wine this night, yea, though he lived of the alms-basket." Now it is very clear that our Lord and his disciples made use of wine at the Passover: nay, Christ may be said to have given a direct sanction to what might have been regarded as the innovation of tradition; for He took the cup which men had introduced into the paschal supper, and consecrated it in perpetual memorial of his own precious blood. In like manner, with regard to the singing of a psalm or hymn—there is nothing said in the book of Exodus as to the concluding the paschal supper with any such act, yet the custom was introduced in process of time, and the Jews made a point of singing the hundred and thirteenth and the five following Psalms, Psalms which are said to have been selected, not only because containing,

in the general, high and eminent memorials of God's goodness and deliverance unto Israel, but because they record these five great things, "the coming out of Egypt, the dividing of the sea, the giving of the law, the resurrection of the dead, and the lot of Messias." These psalms were repeated, or chaunted, on other occasions besides that of the Passover—as at the feast of Pentecost, and on the eight days of the feast of Dedication. But at no time was their use more strictly observed than on the night of the Passover, though they were not then all sung at once, but rather dispersed over the service; only so that, when the last cup of wine was filled, the concluding psalms were sung; and thus the solemnities terminated with the chaunt, "Thou art my God, and I will praise thee; thou art my God, I will exalt thee. O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever." As we are expressly told that Christ concluded the Passover with a psalm or hymn, we cannot well doubt, that, having conformed in other respects to the existing customs of the Jews, He conformed also in this; and that, consequently, the words which He sung with his disciples were the words then ordinarily used in the solemn commemoration of the deliverance from Egypt. We shall assume this through the remainder of our discourse; so that if, over and above the fact of a hymn having been sung, we have occasion to refer to the subject-matter of the hymn, we shall turn to the psalms which constituted what the Jews

called the Hallel, from the repetition of the word "Hallelujah," and seek in them for the expressions which were woven into the anthem of our Lord and his Apostles.

There are many truths which present themselves to the mind, when it duly ponders the simple statement of the text. Our foregoing remarks, bearing merely on the fact that Christ conformed to the innovations of the Jews, will only help us to the making one use, though an important one, of the passage. We shall find, however, as we proceed, that what we may have been used to pass by, as the bare announcement of a fact but little interesting to ourselves, is fraught with rich and varied instruction. Let us then employ ourselves, without anticipating any further the lessons to be extracted, in considering whether, as with all other Scripture, it were not for our admonition and instruction in righteousness, that the sacred historian, having given us the account of the last supper, was directed to record of Christ and his Apostles, that "when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives."

Now the first important truth, on which we would speak, as enforced or illustrated by the passage under review, is that to which our introductory remarks have all tended, that our blessed Lord, by conforming to certain customs of the Jews in the eating of the Passover, gave his sanction to ceremonies which may not be able to plead a divine institution. We have shown you that it was not only in the singing of

psalms, but in many other particulars, such as the recumbent posture, and the drinking of wine, that the Jews had altered, or added to, the original practice, but that our Saviour made no objection to the alteration or addition. He celebrated the Passover just as He found it then used to be celebrated, submitting, so to speak, to tradition and custom. And yet, had there been any thing of a captious spirit, there might perhaps have been matter for doubt or disputation. It might have been urged, with some show of justice, that the innovations were not necessarily in keeping with the character of the ordinance; that the recumbent posture, for example, and the drinking of wine, as betokening, or according with, security and gladness, scarcely suited the commemoration of events which had been marked by hurry, agitation, and alarm. And with regard even to the singing of psalms—if it had been admitted that the occasion was one which would well warrant the praising God with loud anthems, it might still have been asked, Why use these particular psalms? Have we not the Song of Miriam, which, as composed immediately after the deliverance from Egypt, would be far more appropriate? or have we not the song of Moses? and would not the song of the leader, through whom the Passover was instituted, and the emancipation achieved, remind us better of what we owe to God, than the words of one who lived long after the recorded events, when we were settled as a nation, and not wanderers in the desert?

We think there would have been no difficulty in thus making out, so to speak, a sort of plausible case against the innovations of the Jews in the Passover service. Had our Lord been a leader, disposed to make ceremonies the occasion of schism, He might have armed Himself with very specious objections, and have urged that there were conscientious grounds for separating from the communion of the national Church. But it is evident that our blessed Saviour acknowledged a power in the Church of decreeing rites and ceremonies, and of changing those rites and ceremonies "according (as our thirty-fourth Article expresses it) to the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's word." He did not require that every ceremony should be able to plead a positive command in the Bible, nor that it should prove itself modelled after the original practice. Had He done this, it is manifest that He must have objected to the ceremonies in the celebration of the Passover; for they could not plead a divine institution, and were rather at variance than in accordance with what had been at first appointed or observed. But we may justly conclude that our Lord proceeded on what (were it not for modern cavils) we might call a self-evident principle, that rites and ceremonies are not in themselves any part of the public worship of God; they are nothing but circumstances and customs to be observed in the conducting that worship, and may therefore be enacted and altered as shall seem best to the

Church. Had the innovations of the Jews interfered, in any measure, with the character of the Passover as a religious ordinance, had they at all opposed its commemorative office, or militated against it as a sacrifice and a sacrament, we cannot doubt that Christ would have entered his protest, that He would never have given the sanction of his example to what would have been a corruption of the worship of God. This, however, is more than can justly be affirmed of any mere rite or ceremony; for rites or ceremonies, so long as they are not against Scripture, must be regarded as indifferent things, neither good in themselves, nor bad; and if they are indifferent, they may be omitted, or introduced, or changed, without at all affecting the act of divine worship, and merely in conformity, according to diversity of circumstances, with the rule of the Apostle, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Perhaps the Jews, in changing the posture in which the Passover was to be eaten, went as near to an interference with the ordinance itself as any mere rite or ceremony could go; for it might have been urged that a different, if not an untrue, character was given to the ordinance, the aspect of composedness and rest having been made to take the place of that of haste and agitation. But you are to remember that the circumstances of the Israelites were really changed: the Passover, as to be commemorated in after times, found them in a very altered position from what they had occupied when the

Passover was originally instituted; and the new rites, which they introduced, did but correspond to this new position; they interfered neither with the slaying, nor with the eating of the lamb; they were only so far different from the old as to indicate, what was matter of fact in regard of the Jews, that, as their fathers eat the Passover in a night of disaster and death, themselves were allowed, through the mercy of God, to eat of it in security and gladness. And it can hardly fail to strike you, that, in such an alteration, when distinctly sanctioned by the practice of our Lord, we have a precedent for changes which the Church may have introduced into the ceremonies of religion. Take, for example, a case which bears close resemblance to that just considered. When the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was originally instituted, the Apostles sat or reclined in the receiving it; whereas it is now the appointment of the Church, that we should kneel to receive it. There has been, that is, much of the same departure from the first practice as in the instance of the Passover. And if by the act of kneeling we offered any adoration to the bread and the wine, as though we supposed them substantially changed into Christ's body and blood, it is evident that the alteration in the ceremony would be an infringement of the Sacrament itself, and that no Church would have right to substitute the kneeling for the sitting. But the kneeling at the Communion, as we are expressly taught by the Church, is meant only "for a

signification of our humble and grateful acknowledgment of the benefits of Christ therein given to all worthy receivers ;” and the alteration may therefore be said to be just such as was made by the Jews in respect of the Passover—an alteration corresponding to altered circumstances : when the Lord’s Supper was instituted, Christ had not died, and the benefits of his death, as conveyed through the Sacrament, were but partially, if at all, understood ; but, now that Christ hath died, and the Spirit been given to explain and apply his finished work, we know that the Lord’s Supper is the great instituted means for the communication to our souls of the results of his sacrifice ; and surely, if a reclining posture became those who had yet to learn what the Sacrament would do for them, a kneeling may be more appropriate, when the office of that holy mystery has been more unfolded.

But without insisting further on particular instances, which would only unduly detain us from other and more interesting truths, we venture to take our Lord’s conduct, in regard of the ceremonies at the Passover, as establishing the authority of the Church to ordain and alter ceremonies and rites, and as strongly condemning those who would make mere ceremonies and rites the excuses for disunion and schism. Our Lord conformed to customs and alterations, for which it would have been impossible to produce divine warrant, and against which it would not have been difficult to advance some specious ob-

jections. And we argue, therefore, that the Church is not obliged to find chapter and verse for every ceremony which she is pleased to enjoin, as though she had no power of settling points of discipline or order, except so far as she can justify the settlement by an appeal to inspired authority. We argue further, from the instance before us, that, the Church having appointed what she judges most for the general good, individuals have no right to separate and oppose, because they do not find the appointment precisely congenial with their feelings or circumstances. Look at Christ and his Apostles—they were about to be parted: Christ was just entering upon scenes immeasurably more tremendous than had ever been passed through by any of our race; the Apostles were full of apprehensions and grief, for their Lord had announced his departure, and the announcement had distracted their minds. What an unseasonable moment for singing joyous hymns! How natural to have said, “This part of the appointed service is not suited to us now; and, forasmuch as it certainly is not of divine institution, we may surely dispense with it, when our hearts are so heavy and sad.” But no! it was the ordinance of the Church: the Church had full authority to appoint such an ordinance; and Christ and his Apostles would give their testimony to the duty of conformity to all lawful ordinances, whether in unison or not with individual feelings. And on this account, as we may venture to believe—or, if not for

this purpose, assuredly with this result—though they were stricken in spirit, disquieted, yea, sorely distressed, they would not depart from the chamber till they had done all which was enjoined by the Church, and thus shown that they acknowledged her authority; it was not until “they had sung an hymn,” that “they went out into the Mount of Olives.”

But now let us take another view of this fact. We have just considered the singing of an hymn as inappropriate to the circumstances of Christ and his Apostles; and no doubt there was an apparent unsuitableness which might have been pleaded by those who sought an excuse for disobedience to ecclesiastical rule. Solomon has said, “As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart.” And thus the wise man may be considered as having delivered his testimony against the fitness of music and minstrelsy, when there is a weight at the heart, and the spirits are oppressed. But “a greater than Solomon is here;” and we may perhaps say that it was with the singing of a hymn that Christ prepared Himself for his unknown agony. Setting aside all considerations drawn from the ordinances of the Church, is it at all strange that our blessed Lord and his disciples should have sung joyous hymns at a moment so full of darkness and dread? For joyous hymns they were in which they joined: music has its melancholy strains as well as its gladdening—the dirge for the funeral as well as the song for the mar-

riage or the banquet ; and Christ and his Apostles might have thrown the sadness of their spirits into the slow, measured cadences of some solemn lament. But, as we have just said, they were joyous hymns in which they joined. Look at the Jewish Hallel, and you find it abounding in expressions of confidence and praise : “The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous : the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted ; the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.”

And was it, think you, a strange preparation for the Mount of Olives, and the garden of Gethsemane, thus to commemorate the mercies, and chaunt the praises of the Most High God ? Nay, it is recorded of Luther that, on receiving any discouraging news, he was wont to say, “Come, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm,”—that Psalm which commences with the words, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble ; therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” And it were well for us, my brethren, if in seasons of trouble, we betook ourselves to praise, and not only to prayer. If we find ourselves in circumstances of difficulty, if dangers surround us, and duties seem too great for our strength, we almost naturally cry unto God, and entreat of Him assistance and guardian-

ship. And indeed we do right : God has made our receiving conditional on our asking ; and we can never be too diligent in supplicating at his hands the supply of our many necessities. But ought we to confine ourselves to prayer, as though praise were out of place when mercies are needed, and only became us when they have just been received ? Not so : praise is the best auxiliary to prayer ; and he who most bears in mind what has been done for him by God, will be most emboldened to supplicate fresh gifts from above. We should recount God's mercies, we should call upon our souls, and all that is within us, to laud and magnify his name, when summoned to face new trials, and encounter fresh dangers. Would it sound to you strange, if on approaching the chamber where, as you knew, the father of a family had just breathed his last, you heard voices mingling, not in a melancholy chaunt, but rather in one of lofty commemoration, such as might be taken from the Jewish Hallel, "The Lord hath been mindful of us ; he will bless us ; he will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron ? The Lord is on my side, I will not fear : what can man do unto me ?" Would you be disposed to say that the widow and the orphans, whose voices you recognized in the thankful anthem, were strangely employed ? and that the utterances over the dead would have more fittingly been those of earnest petition unto God, of deep-drawn entreaty for the light of his countenance, and the strength of his Spirit ? Nay, the widow and

her orphans, if not actually praying the most effectual of prayers, would be thereby most effectually preparing themselves for praying unto God: if, now that their chief earthly stay is removed, they have to enter on a dark and dangerous path, they cannot do better than thus call to mind what the Almighty has proved Himself to others and themselves; the anthem is the best prelude to the supplication; and their first step towards the Mount of Olives will be all the firmer, if, before they cry, "Hold thou up our goings in thy paths," they join in the song, "His merciful kindness is great towards us, and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever; praise ye the Lord."

We wish you to draw this lesson from the last action of Christ and his Apostles, before they went forth to extraordinary trial. We wish you to observe, and understand, that so far from being unsuited to circumstances of perplexity and danger, the song of praise should at least mingle with the cry of prayer, and that, if you would arm yourselves for trouble and for duty you should recount the marvellous acts of the Lord, as well as supplicate the communications of his grace. This is too much overlooked and neglected by Christians. They are more familiar with the earnest petition than with the grateful anthem. Like the captives in Babylon, they hang their harps upon the willows, when they find themselves in a strange land; whereas, if they would sing "one of the songs of Zion," it would not

only remind them of home, but encourage them to ask assistance, and expect deliverance. Make trial of this method, ye who have a dark path before you, and who shrink from entering into the cloud. You have offered prayer—have you also offered praise? you have commended yourselves to God for the future—have you also commemorated his care of you through the past? Say not, “How can I sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” With this burden upon me, and this prospect before me, it is too much to expect me to do more than pray: who can sing songs with a heavy heart? This is the very feeling against which we would warn you. There is no Christian with so great cause of sorrow, as to be without a greater of thankfulness. And the chords of the soul will never give forth so fervent a prayer, as when the Christian has been endeavouring to string them to the chorus of praise. Look at Christ and his Apostles. You will not say that your circumstances can be more distressing than theirs; that there is more, in the peculiarities of the trial, to excuse you from singing “the Lord’s song.” Yet before they departed—the Redeemer to his terrible agony, the disciples to the dreaded separation—the last thing which they did was to join in the chanting of thankful psalms: it was not until “they had sung an hymn,” but then it was, that “they went out into the Mount of Olives.”

But we have yet to observe, that, so far as praise is a great auxiliary to prayer, and therefore well

adapted to circumstances of perplexity and danger, the repetition of thankful psalms might seem sufficient; whereas, with Christ and his Apostles, there was the singing of such psalms. We think that this fact ought not to be let pass without a more special comment.

We are too apt to regard music as a human art, or invention, just because men make certain musical instruments, and compose certain musical pieces. And hence there are Christians who would banish music from the public worship of God, as though unsuited to, or unworthy of, so high and illustrious an employment. But it is forgotten, as has been observed by a well-known writer¹, that the principles of harmony are in the elements of nature, that, "the element of air was as certainly ordained to give us harmonious sounds in due measure, as to give respiration to the lungs." God has given us "music in the air, as he hath given us wine in the grape;" leaving it to man to draw forth the rich melody, as well as to extract the inspiriting juice, but designing that both should be employed to his glory, and used in his service. Wine was eminently consecrated for religion, when chosen as the sacramental representation of the precious blood of the Redeemer; and a holy distinction ought never to be denied to music, whilst the Psalmist, speaking undoubtedly by the Spirit of God, exclaims, "Praise him with stringed instruments and organs; praise him upon the loud

¹ Jones, of Nayland.

cymbals ; praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.”

It is not, however, instrumental music which is mentioned in the text. “They sang an hymn.” There is another remarkable instance recorded in the New Testament of God’s praises having been sung at a strange time, and in a strange place. Paul and Silas, thrust into the inner prison at Philippi, and with their feet made fast in the stocks, had recourse to singing, as though their condition had been prosperous, and their spirits elated. “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them.” They were not content with reminding each the other of the goodness of God, with speaking of his greatness and lovingkindness : “they sang praises unto God ;” and that, too, with so loud a voice, that the other prisoners heard them, though confined in the remotest parts of the dungeon. In like manner, Christ and his Apostles “sang an hymn :” they were not satisfied with repeating an hymn ; and we may certainly gather from this, that God’s praises ought to be sung rather than spoken, that singing is the more appropriate vehicle, even when circumstances may be such as to make music seem almost out of place.

It may, we think, fairly be said that the power of singing has not been sufficiently considered as one of the Creator’s gifts to his creatures, and, therefore, intended to be used to his glory. We recognize

this fact in regard of the power of speech: we acknowledge that God must have endowed man with the faculty of uttering articulate sounds, and have clothed his tongue with language; and we confess that this very fact renders us responsible, in a high sense, for our words, and destroys all surprise that words are to be made a criterion at the last. A noble gift is abused, whensoever an idle word is spoken: why then should we marvel at the assertion of our Lord, "I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment?" "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

But, to quote again from the writer already referred to¹, "the faculty, by which the voice forms musical sounds, is as wonderful as the flexure of the organs of speech in the articulation of words." Considered as the result of certain mechanical arrangements, singing is perhaps even more marvellous than speaking, or gives a stronger witness to the skill and the power of the Creator. This is not the place for bringing proof of such assertion; but they who have considered the human throat as a musical instrument, and have examined, on this supposition, its structure and capacity, declare that it presents "such a refinement on mechanism as exceeds all description." And we are not to doubt that God gave this faculty to

¹ Jones.

man, that he might employ it on his praises. The Psalmist having said, "Awake, psaltery and harp," exclaims, "I myself will awake early:" it did not content him, that instruments of music should start from their silence, and give forth the slumbering harmony; he regarded himself as an instrument more curious, and more costly, than any framed by a human artificer; and, therefore, would he too awake and swell with his voice the tide of melody.

But singing, like music in general, has been too much given up by the Church to the world; it has not been sufficiently considered, and cultivated, as designed for religious ends, and helpful to religious feelings. And hence, for the most part, our psalmody is discreditable to our congregations; it is either given over to a few hired singers, as though we were to praise God by deputy; or is left with the children of the National schools, as though, in growing older, we had less cause for thankfulness. Let me say that the efforts which are now being systematically made throughout the country to teach our population to sing, should be regarded with great interest and pleasure by the Christian. Such efforts have a more immediate bearing than is, perhaps, commonly thought, on the national piety. I do not merely mean that there is a humanizing power in music, and that the poor, taught to sing, are likely to be less wild, and less prone to disorder, and therefore more accessible to the ministrations of religion. Not, indeed, that I would make no account of this,

for I thoroughly believe that, in improving the tastes of a people, you are doing much for their moral advancement. I like to see our cottagers encouraged to train the rose and the honeysuckle round their doors, and our weavers, as is often the fact, dividing their attention between their looms and their carnations; for the man who can take care of a flower, and who is all alive to its beauty, is far less likely than another, who has no delight in such recreations, to give himself up to gross lusts and habits. But, independently on this, if singing were generally taught, the psalmody in our churches could not fail to be generally improved. And I am quite sure that this could not take place without, by the blessing of God, a great spiritual benefit. When many voices join heartily in prayer, it is hardly possible to remain undevout; when many voices join heartily in praise, it is hardly possible to remain indifferent. Every one feels this. In a congregation, where the responses are generally left to the clerk and the children, how difficult is it to pray! whereas, if the majority join, one is drawn in almost unconsciously, and cannot keep back his cordial amen. Thus, also, in a congregation where few attempt to sing, how difficult is it to magnify the Lord! but who can resist the rush of many voices? whose bosom does not swell, as old and young, rich and poor, mingle their notes of adoration and thankfulness?

You may tell me that there is not necessarily any religion in all this emotion. I know that; and I

would not have you mistake emotion for religion. But we are creatures so constituted as to be acted on through our senses and feelings; and whilst emotion is not religion, it will often be a great step towards it. The man who has imbibed, so to speak, the spirit of prayer and of praise from the surrounding assembly, is far more likely to give an attentive ear to the preached word, and to receive from it a lasting impression, than another whose natural coldness has been increased by that of the mass in which he found himself placed. In teaching, therefore, a people to sing with the voice "the songs of Zion," we cannot but believe that, God helping, much is done towards teaching them to sing with the understanding and the heart. A faculty is developed, which God designed for his glory, but which has, comparatively, been allowed to remain almost useless. Yes, a faculty which God designed for his glory; and, if so designed, it cannot lie idle without injury, nor be rightly exercised without advantage. And I seem to learn, from our text, that it is not enough that we praise God with speech. Christ and his Apostles "sang an hymn," ere "they went out into the Mount of Olives." What had music, cheerful and animated music, to do with so sad and solemn an occasion? Nay, there is music in heaven: they who stand on the "sea of glass mingled with fire," have "the harps of God" in their hands: "they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the

Lamb :” why then should music ever be out of place with those whose affections are above ?

It would not be out of place in the chamber of the dying believer. He has just received, through the holy mystery of the Eucharist, the body and the blood of his blessed Redeemer. And now his own failing voice, and the voices of relatives and friends, join in chaunting words which the Church directs to be either said, or sung, as the conclusion of the sacramental service : “ Glory be to God on high, and in earth peace, goodwill towards men. We praise thee, we bless thee, we worship thee, we glorify thee, we give thanks to thee for thy great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.” Wonder ye, that, when there was the option either to say or to sing, they chose the singing at such a moment ? Nay, they all felt that they had a rough hill to climb ; and they remembered, that, when Christ and his Apostles had finished their last supper, “ they sang an hymn,” and then “ went out into the Mount of Olives.”

S E R M O N V.

CÆSAR'S HOUSEHOLD.

PHIL. iv. 22.

“ All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Cæsar's household.”

THE earlier ages of the Church seem to have been distinguished by a love which made all Christians regard themselves as members of one family. The saying of our Lord, “ By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another,” appears to have been successfully taken as furnishing their rule of conduct ; for “ See how these Christians love one another,” was the common remark of enemies and persecutors.

And the observable thing is, that the love, of which we speak, was actually the love of Christians as Christians, irrespective altogether of other claims upon affection. The moment a man embraced

Christianity, he was regarded as a brother, and felt to be a brother, by the whole Christian body: a thousand hearts at once beat kindly towards him; and multitudes, who were never likely to see him in the flesh, were instantly one with him in spirit. It may admit of great doubt, whether there be much, in our own day, of that which thus distinguished the beginning of Christianity. The love of Christians because they are Christians, no regard being had to country or condition—is this still a strongly marked characteristic of those who profess themselves the disciples of the Redeemer? There was something very touching and beautiful in Christ's promise to such as should forsake all for his sake: "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands." How was such a promise fulfilled, except that they, who had been cast out for their religion from their own families and possessions, found themselves admitted at once into a new household, and endowed with new property, even the household and the property of the whole Christian community? For every natural relation whom they had lost, they obtained instantly a hundred spiritual; and the goods, of which they had been spoiled, returned to them, a thousand-fold multiplied, in the possessions of those who received them as children and brethren. Thus was

strikingly verified a description long before given of God by the Psalmist: "He setteth the solitary in families"—for they who were to all appearance abandoned, left orphaned and alone in the world, found themselves surrounded by kinsmen.

But it is only, we fear, in a very limited sense, that the like can be affirmed of the Christians of our own day. Yet the criterion of genuine Christianity remains just what it was: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren: he that loveth not his brother abideth in death." In our own time the ends of the earth are being wondrously brought together: there is an ever-growing facility of communication between country and country; and this must rapidly break down many barriers, and bring far-scattered tribes into familiar intercourse. In earlier times, nation was widely divided from nation: the inhabitants of different lands were necessarily almost strangers to each other; and you could not have expected an approximation to universal brotherhood. But then it was, in the face of all obstacles to personal communion, that the spirit of Christianity showed its comprehensive and amalgamating energies: the name of Christ was as a spell to annihilate distance; to plant the cross in a land, sufficed to make that land one with districts removed from it by the diameter of the globe. Alas for the colder temper of modern times! We have made paths across the waters, we have exalted the valleys, we have brought low the

hills, so that we can visit every region, and scarce seem to leave our home ; but where is that glowing and ample charity, which would throb towards Christians whom we have never seen, and make us feel that our own household includes the far off and the near, all who worship the same God, and trust in the same Mediator ?

We have been led into these remarks, from observing, in the apostolical writings, the affectionate greetings which the members of one Church send to those of another. For the most part, these Churches had no intercourse the one with the other ; they were widely separated by situation ; and, had it not been for the bond of a common faith, their members would have been as much strangers as though they had belonged to different orders of being. And yet you would judge, from the warm remembrances, the kindly messages, which pass between them, that they were associated by most intimate relationship, that they were friends who had spent years together, or kinsmen who had been brought up beneath the same roof. When St. Paul wrote thus to the Colossians, "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh," you would have thought, from the energy of his expressions, that it must have been for some dear and long-tried acquaintance that he was thus deeply interested, had he not immediately described the objects of his solicitude, as those who had not seen

his face in the flesh. And, in like manner, when you read the salutations sent by one Church to another, the warm and cordial greetings, you would conclude that these Churches had held familiar intercourse, that their members had conversed much together, and mingled in the intimacies of life, if you did not know, from other sources of information, that they were strangers to each other, except as all belonging to Christ's mystical body. So strong a link of association was Christianity then felt to be! Christians knew that there were Christians in distant lands, whom they were never likely to visit, and who were never likely to visit them—but what mattered it, that they were not to see one another in the flesh? They were grafted into the same vine, they were washed in the same blood, they were quickened by the same Spirit; and feeling, therefore, as though one mother had borne them, and one home sheltered them, they poured forth hearty salutations, and multiplied expressions of the very tenderest affection.

It was thus with the Romans and the Philippians. They were widely removed the one from the other; and probably there had been little or no personal intercourse between the members of the Churches. Yet you find, from our text, that the Christians at Rome felt kindly towards the Christians at Philippi, and charged St. Paul with their sentiments of esteem and good-will. "All the saints salute you"—not, you observe, a few of the most distinguished, of those who had advanced farthest in the charity enjoined by

the Gospel—but “all the saints salute you.” O blessed estate of a Christian Church, when every member had a cordial greeting to send to persons whom he had never beheld, but whom he loved, as loving the same Saviour with himself.

You will, however, naturally suppose that we selected our present text, not so much as containing the general salutation of one Church by another, as on account of its marking out certain individuals as specially earnest in their greetings. “All the saints salute you; chiefly, they that are of Cæsar’s household.” There was a friendly salutation from all the members of the Roman Church; but the most friendly issued from those who appertained to the household of Cæsar. And we consider this as an intimation which ought not to be cursorily passed over. We think that truths and lessons of no common interest may be drawn from this brief reference to the Christians who were to be found in the imperial circle. We design, therefore, to confine ourselves to the examining this reference, to the endeavouring to discover what it may imply, and what it may enjoin. We are aware, that, at first, it will probably appear to you a barren statement, the announcement of a simple fact, on which no comment is needed, and from which little, if any, instruction can be drawn. But if you would read the Bible with this rule in mind, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,” you would

find that nothing is stated which could be omitted without loss ; and that often, where there is least to strike the superficial reader, there is most to repay the diligent student. Without then further preface, and without proposing any plan of discourse, which might perhaps only impede our inquiries, we ask your attention, whilst endeavouring to show what truths and lessons are furnished by the information that there were saints in the household of Cæsar, and that these were foremost in greeting the saints at Philippi.

Now you are to observe that the throne of the Cæsars was at this time occupied by Nero, a monster rather than a man, whose vices and cruelties will make his name infamous to the very end of the world. Certainly, if ever there were an atmosphere uncongenial to Christianity, it may be supposed to have been that of the court and palace of this bloody debauchee. It ordinarily happens, that the character of the prince gives the tone to that of his courtiers and attendants ; and it would therefore be hardly imaginable, that the household of a Nero was not composed in the main of the fierce and the dissolute. And it should further be observed that there was a direct hostility to Christianity on the part of the emperor ; he became eventually a most bitter persecutor of the Christians, and St. Paul himself perished by his sword. Where then, on all human calculation, was there less likelihood of the Gospel gaining footing than in the court and household of Nero ?

Yet so true was St. Paul's assertion, that the weapons of his warfare were "mighty through God to the casting-down of strong-holds," that there were men of Cæsar's household, worthy the high title of saints; men not secretly, but openly, Christians; not ashamed of their profession, but willing to give it all publicity by sending greetings to Christians in other cities of the earth. And our first inquiry will naturally be, as to the agency which brought round so unlikely a result; how it came to pass, that an entrance was achieved, and a firm footing gained for Christianity, where there might have seemed a moral impossibility against its admission, or, at all events, its settlement? Your minds will naturally turn, in answer to this inquiry, to the miraculous gifts with which St. Paul was endowed, to the credentials which he was enabled to furnish of the divine origin of Christianity, and to the power and persuasiveness with which he set forth its doctrines. You will remember with what noble intrepidity he rose up before the sages of Greece, and won over even proud philosophy by his reasoning and eloquence; and you will further call to mind, how, when he spake unflinchingly to Felix, the slave of base lusts, the haughty Roman trembled, as though the judgment had already been upon him with its terrors. And whilst there are these registered achievements of the great Apostle to the Gentiles, you think it quite intelligible that he should have made proselytes even from the household of Nero: you perhaps imagine

him working some great miracle, in order to compel the attention of the emperor and his court, and then preaching, with a more than human oratory, the Gospel of Christ, till slumbering consciences were startled, and bold vices abashed.

Indeed you do right in thus ascribing extraordinary power to the miracles and sermons of St. Paul: we could have felt no surprise, supposing this Apostle to have had opportunities of audience, had even Nero trembled like Felix, and had converts been won from the courtiers of Rome, as well as from the philosophers of Athens. But, nevertheless, in this instance the explanation utterly fails: St. Paul was now a prisoner, kept in close confinement; and, though allowed to receive those who came unto him, was not at liberty, as at other times, to labour openly and vigorously at propagating the Gospel. He could not go, as you have supposed him, like Moses and Aaron, with the rod in his hand, and compel by his miracles the attention of a profligate king, and then deliver, in the name of the living God, the message of rebuke, and the prophecy of vengeance. And yet it was at this very time, when the chief instrument in the diffusion of Christianity seemed comparatively disabled, that the great triumph was won, and the imperial household gave members to the Church. Nay, and more than this, it appears to have been actually in consequence of his being a prisoner for the faith, rather than a preacher of the faith, that St. Paul was instrumental to the obtaining this vic-

tory. If you refer to the commencement of this Epistle to the Philippians, you will find the Apostle ascribing to his imprisonment the very result of which we are now seeking the cause. He expresses himself fearful lest the Philippians should have thought that the afflictions, with which he had been visited, had impeded the progress of the Gospel. He assures them that quite the contrary effect had been produced: "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which have happened unto me, have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places." Thus, you see, it was not by his sermons, it was literally by his bonds, that the attention of the court had been attracted to Christianity: it was as a captive that he had mastered rulers, and with his chain that he had struck off their fetters. In the following verse he adds another statement as to the efficaciousness of his bonds: "And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Hence there were two ways, as it would appear, in which his bonds gave enlargement to Christianity. The patience and meekness with which he submitted to long and unjust confinement, drew public attention, and compelled men to feel, that, where there was such willingness to suffer, there must be the consciousness of advocating truth. And then the supports and consolations, which were ministered to him by God,

taught other Christians that they could not be losers through intrepidity in preaching the Gospel, and therefore nerved them to greater energy in the work from which Paul himself was temporarily withdrawn. In these ways were the Apostle's bonds influential; so that when, to all appearance, he was able to do least, when his power of usefulness seemed the most limited, then was it that he won admission for Christianity into the circle from which you would have thought it most surely excluded.

We cannot but think that a great lesson was thus given, as to God's power of overruling evil for good, of producing the most signal results when the employed instrumentality appears the least adequate. How apt are we to imagine, when a man is overtaken by sickness, or withdrawn, through one cause or another, from more active duty, that his period of usefulness has closed! How ready are we to lament over what we call a mysterious dispensation, as the Roman Christians may have done over the imprisonment of St. Paul! But who shall say that it does not often come to pass, that the minister preaches far more effectually from his sick-bed, than ever he did from his pulpit? The report, which goes forth amongst his people, of the patience with which he bore pain, and the calmness with which he met death, will perhaps do more towards overcoming their resistance to the Gospel, than all his energy effected, whilst he gave himself night and day to the

bringing them to repentance. Or again, was it whilst they were free to move through a land, and to wrestle boldly with prevailing errors and superstitions, that martyrs and confessors did most for the cause of God and of truth? Was it not rather when they were actually in the clutches of the persecutor, pining in dungeons, or dragged to the scaffold? The flame, which consumed them, prevailed most to the scattering the spiritual darkness; and their dust was as seed whence moral verdure sprang. Oh, let no one ever think, that, because unable to exert himself openly and actively, as he once did, for God, he has no duties to perform, no services to render, no rewards to secure. A true Christian is never, if we may use a common expression, laid by: God makes use of him in sickness and in health, in life and in death. And the influence which proceeds from him, when languishing on his couch, reduced to poverty, or overwhelmed with affliction, is often incomparably greater than when, in the fulness of his strength, with every engine at his disposal, he moved amongst his fellow men, and took the lead in each benevolent enterprise. It is on sick-beds that the sustaining power of Christianity is most displayed: it is amid multiplied troubles that its professed comforts are put to the proof: it is by dying men that its best promises are shown to have been indeed made by God. And even when the grave has closed upon a righteous man, is it not often true that "he, being

dead, yet speaketh?" His memory admonishes and encourages, and that, too, more powerfully than even his living example.

Let no one, then, conclude himself disabled from doing God service, because he can no longer perform active duties, nor take visible part in advancing Christ's kingdom upon earth. Resignation has its victories as well as intrepidity: converts may be made through meekness in trial, as well as through boldness in enterprise. And if we would reconcile ourselves to the apparent suspension of our usefulness; if we would learn that God may be employing us most, when He seems to have most withdrawn us from employment; let us ponder the fact brought before us by our text. I think upon Rome, the metropolis of the world, upon the haughty Cæsars, giving laws to well nigh all the nations of the earth. O that Christianity might make way into the imperial halls! I should feel as though it were indeed about to triumph over heathenism, were it to penetrate the palace of Nero. And then I hear that St. Paul is approaching towards Rome—St. Paul, who has carried the Gospel to the east and west, the north and south, and every where made falsehood quail before truth. My expectations are raised. This great champion of Christianity may succeed where there is most to discourage, and gain over Nero's courtiers, if not Nero himself. But then I hear that St. Paul comes as a prisoner: I see him used as a criminal, and debarred from all opportunity of pub-

lishing the Gospel to the illustrious and powerful. My hopes are destroyed. The great Apostle seems to me completely disarmed; and the picture, which I had fondly drawn, of Christianity growing dominant through God's blessing on his labours, disappears when I behold him detained in captivity. Alas for human shortsightedness and miscalculation! Never again let me dare reckon God's servants least powerfully, when least visibly instrumental in promoting his cause. St. Paul is a prisoner; St. Paul cannot go boldly to the court, and preach to the mighty; but, in less than two years, he is able to declare, "My bonds are manifest in all the palace," and to enumerate amongst the saints, who send greetings to the Philippians, "chiefly them that are of Cæsar's household."

We go on to observe to you—and the observation is of prime importance—that a man cannot be placed in circumstances so disadvantageous to piety as to put it out of his power to give heed to the duties of religion. We have already spoken to you of the character of Nero, and of the profligacy which must have deformed his household and court. We have admitted that, if ever there were an atmosphere uncongenial to Christianity, it must have been that of the Roman court, with such an emperor at its head. We could not have been surprised, had the religion of Jesus striven in vain for admission; and it was the little apparent likelihood of there being saints in the household of Cæsar, which suggested

the foregoing inquiry as to the instrumentality through which the Gospel succeeded in making these converts. But, nevertheless, the converts were made, and that too, you are carefully to remember, not through any extraordinary agency, seeing that the employed preaching was not that of St. Paul, but only of subordinate ministers. Certainly such an instance as this should show the worthlessness of an excuse with which men would sometimes palliate their neglect of religion—that they are exposed to such temptations, surrounded by such hindrances, or liable to such opposition, that it is vain for them to attempt the great duties of repentance and faith. We challenge any man to show that he is more unfavourably circumstanced than the members of Nero's household must have been. We challenge him to show any likelihood that the profession of religion would expose him to greater dangers, bring on him more obloquy, or cause severer loss, than might have been expected to follow the exchange of Heathenism for Christianity, by those who bore office in the Roman Emperor's court. And whilst we have before us full evidence, that even the servants of Nero could overcome every disadvantage, and "shine as lights" in the church of the Redeemer, we can never admit that the temporal circumstances of any man disqualify him for the being a true Christian, or put such obstacles in his way as excuse his not advancing to eminence as a believer.

We readily acknowledge that more appears done

for one man than for another; that some circumstances may be said to conduce to the making men pious, whilst others increase the difficulty of separation from the world, and consecration to God. But we can be certain, from the known strength of divine grace, and its sufficiency to all the ends of the renewal and perfecting of our nature, that, under every possible disadvantage, there may be a striving with evil, and a following after good, in obedience to the precepts, and in hope of the recompences, of the Gospel. We will not, at present, discuss whether it be a man's duty, when he feels his circumstances unfavourable to personal religion, to labour to escape from those circumstances; whether the courtier should flee the court where there are incitements to evil, the merchant the traffic which burdens him with cares, or the servant the household where godliness is held in contempt. We may find opportunity hereafter of treating this point; we now only say, that the case may often be one in which there is no escape from the circumstances which make piety difficult, and in which the duty of remaining in the disadvantageous position may be as clear as that of struggling against its disadvantages. But we contend that, whensoever such is the case, it is no apology for an individual's continuing void of personal religion, that he would have great difficulties to wrestle with in becoming religious. The individual may fasten on these difficulties, and urge them in excuse, when conscience admonishes him as to

the great duties of godliness. But the excuse will not bear investigation ; forasmuch as it assumes that God has put it out of the man's power to provide for his soul's safety in eternity ; and to assume this is to contradict the Divine word, and throw scorn on the Divine attributes.

We take, for example, the instance most naturally suggested by our text, that of a servant in an irreligious family. We have great sympathy with persons so circumstanced : we count their situation one of no common difficulty. Their superiors set them a bad example, an example of sabbath-breaking, of neglect of all religion, and, perhaps, even of undisguised vice. Few opportunities are afforded them of attending public worship ; and they have but little time for private devotion. If inclined to give heed to religion, they cannot but perceive that any indication of piety would perhaps lose them the favour of their master, and bring upon them the ridicule of their associates. We say again that we have great sympathy with an individual thus situated : we feel that he has more than a common battle to fight, if he stand forth as a candidate for immortality. But there is nothing in his position to make it impracticable that he become truly religious, nor excusable that he defer the season of providing for the soul. Be his difficulties what they may, we can be confident that they would rapidly disappear before the earnest resolve of seeking "first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." He has but to begin,

and presently would he find that obstacles, which appeared insurmountable, are gradually lowered, and that, if he have to encounter all which he dreaded, it is in a strength which grows with the exigence. What we fear for this man, when we know him plied with the remonstrances of conscience, it is not that, if he set himself fearlessly to regulate his conduct by the revealed will of God, he may find that he has not time enough for religion, or that the trials of his station are too great to be surmounted; it is only that he may shield himself behind his confessed disadvantages, and hold himself blameless in not making an attempt, where the likelihood of success seems so slight. We would come down upon him, in his moment of indecision, when conscience is rebuking his neglect of the one thing needful, and when he strives to parry the rebuke, by asking, How he can attend to religion whilst the very air which he breathes seems impregnated with wickedness? We will hear nothing of an impossibility. Time may be made, prayer may be offered, the Bible may be read, vice may be forsaken, contempt may be braved, and the Spirit of the living God fails no man who is not false to himself. And if he plead the ungodliness of the family in which he is placed, and maintain it not to be expected that righteousness should be acquired, where there is every thing to fasten down a man to evil, we require of him to go with us in thought to the household of Nero. We tell him of the depravity of that scourge and disgrace of human kind,

we describe to him the fierce profligacy which pervaded his court: we show him how it was like rushing into the flames, then and there to embrace Christianity: and we leave him to think, if he dare, that any scene, or association, can excuse the neglect of religion, when St. Paul could single out, from the whole mass of Roman Christians, "chiefly them that were of Cæsar's household."

We proceed to what we reckon the most important of the remarks which we have to offer on the passage which forms our subject of discourse. You will observe that the saints, of whom St. Paul speaks in the text, not only belonged to Cæsar's household at the time of their conversion to Christianity, but remained in that household after their conversion. It is evident that they did not feel it their duty to abandon the stations in which Providence had placed them, and seek others apparently more favourable to the growth of religion. And we may conclude that their decision was right, for, having direct intercourse with St. Paul, who could furnish them with rules of conduct derived immediately from God, we cannot doubt that they did what ought to have been done. So that it does not at all follow that a man is to withdraw himself from circumstances of danger and difficulty, and strive to place himself in a condition where there shall be less temptation or opposition. We cannot, indeed, think that a converted man would be justified in seeking employment where he

knew that it would be specially difficult to cultivate religion: but we can believe that he might be justified in retaining his employment, supposing him thus placed at the time of conversion. To desert his employment, because it made religion difficult, would be to declare that the grace, which had converted him, in spite of disadvantages, would not suffice to the establishing and perfecting him; and thus would his first step mark a distrust of God's Spirit, which would augur but ill for his after progress. If an employment were in itself sinful, if it actually could not be carried on without sin, there would be no room for debate; it must be abandoned at once, though utter destitution might seem the inevitable consequence. But if the employment be only dangerous, if it only require a greater measure of circumspection, vigilance, and boldness, the forsaking it may prove timidity rather than prudence; a disposition to evade, rather than to conquer.

We doubt, for example, whether a man, roused to the great work of the saving the soul, could lawfully seek to place himself in the midst of the temptations of a court, and surround himself with those hindrances to spiritual religion which too often abound in the palaces of princes. But it would make all the difference if he were a courtier at the time of his being first made to feel that he had a soul: a court is a lawful, though a dangerous, residence; and it may not only be allowable, it may even be required, that he should continue where he is, and take ad-

vantage of his position to adorn, and diffuse, Christianity. It might not look like a saint to seek employment in the household of Cæsar; but it may be the very part of a saint not to withdraw from the household, and descend into humbler life. A religious servant might not be justified in wilfully entering an irreligious family, where he knew that piety would be discountenanced in every possible way; but if he have become religious, whilst serving in the irreligious family, it may be lawful for him to remain, nay, it may be unlawful for him to leave: it is lawful for him to remain, if he be not required to act against his conscience; it is unlawful for him to leave, if distinct opportunity be afforded him of doing honour to God, and promoting Christ's cause. And this latter supposition will probably hold good in the majority of cases. When one member of an irreligious household is converted, we regard him as the particle of leaven, placed by God in the midst of an unsound mass; and the circumstances must be very peculiar, which would seem to us to warrant the withdrawal of this particle, so that the mass should be again void of any righteous element.

We have great pleasure in contemplating the moral power with which God has invested the meanest of his people. It is too common to judge power by station, and to compute the influence which a man may exert over others, by the temporal advantages which fall to his lot. But there is a power in religion, irrespective altogether of worldly

station: a power which may indeed be used more extensively, if its possessor have command of other forces besides, but which may work the very finest results, supposing him to have nothing else to wield. We refer chiefly to the power of a consistent example; and we should confidently say to the religious servant in the irreligious family, that it is hardly possible to overrate the service which he, or she, may render to the cause of Christianity. We are not supposing the servant to travel beyond the immediate duties of his station, for it is no recommendation of religion when persons put themselves forward, and assume offices to which they have never been called. We only suppose the servant to carry his Christianity into all his occupations, and this will be sure to make him the most respectful, faithful, and diligent in the domestic establishment. He will be quickly distinguished from others by closer attention to his master's interests, by greater care of his master's property, by a stricter adherence to truth, and by a more obliging and submissive deportment. It is nothing to tell us that, often, where there is a religious profession, there are few or none of these characteristics; this is only telling us that hypocrisy is confined to no class of life, but may flourish equally in the kitchen and parlour. Let there be real religion, and, whatever a man's station, it will show itself in the performance of the duties of that station. The rule admits no exceptions, for religion seats itself in the heart, and thence influences all the

actions. Therefore, if there be one, in a mass of irreligious domestics, whom the Spirit of God has brought to repentance and faith, that one will rapidly distinguish himself from the rest by superior civility, diligence, and honesty.

And it is just because true religion will thus necessarily display itself in the practice, that we ascribe to it a power, in every rank of life, of acting silently upon others, and assimilating them to itself. Let the irreligious master perceive that there is no one in his household so trustworthily as the professed disciple of Christ, no one on whose word he can place such dependence, no one who serves him with equal industry and alacrity; and it can hardly fail but that this master will gradually receive an impression favourable to religion, whatever may have been hitherto his opposition and prejudice. There is something mightily ennobling in this; for the meanest in a household, whose days are consumed in the lowest drudgeries of life, is thus represented as invested with a high power of winning triumphs for Christianity, and turning many to righteousness. There may be families to which the preacher of the Gospel can gain no access; they will not come to listen to him on the Sabbath, and would scowl on him as an intruder in the week. And what instrumentality is there, through which to act on such families, barred up, as they are, against both the public and the private ministrations of the word? Nothing would be so hopeful as the instrumentality of pious domestics; and, therefore, God forbid that

such domestics should hastily withdraw themselves from the households. We look to the pious servant to do what the minister of the Gospel has no opportunities of doing, to publish and recommend the doctrine of Christ, not by officious interference, and unbecoming reproof, and unasked for advice ; but by blamelessness of conduct, by devotedness to duty, by fidelity, by humility, by obligingness. We send that servant as our missionary into the very midst of the inaccessible family ; not to deliver messages with his lip, but to deliver them through his life ; and we can almost venture to predict, that if he do indeed, according to St. Paul's direction to servants, " adorn the doctrine of God the Saviour in all things," it will gradually come to pass that religion conciliates some measure of respect, that those above him, and around him, inquire into his motives, and perhaps even seek for themselves what works so beautifully in another.

But if we may fairly contend that such an influence as this is wielded by a righteous domestic in an unrighteous family, we can feel no surprise, that, when God had won to Himself servants from amongst the servants of Nero, He permitted, and perhaps even commanded, their remaining in the service of the profligate emperor. Who knows whether there may not, at first, have been a solitary convert, one who held but a mean place in the imperial household, and who may have desired to escape at once from a scene where there seemed to be so many by whom he might be injured, so few to whom he could do good ? But he may have been admonished to remain ; and by the

mere force of a consistent deportment, he may have borne down much of the opposition to Christianity, till at last, though he prevailed not to the bringing over the bloody emperor himself, he was surrounded by a goodly company of believers, and a Church of the Redeemer rose in the very midst of the palace of the Cæsars. And whether or not it were thus, through the influence of a solitary convert, that the religion of Jesus established itself in the most unpromising scene, the great truth remains beyond controversy, that a post is not to be forsaken because it cannot be occupied without peril to personal piety. Let, therefore, any amongst yourselves, who may be disposed to abandon the station in which God has placed them, because of its dangers and trials, consider whether they may not have been thus circumstanced for the very purpose of being useful to others; and whether, then, it does not become them to persist in hope, rather than to desert in fear. For very difficult would it be to show that any can have more cause to seek a change of service, than men converted from amongst the courtiers and domestics of Nero; and, nevertheless, these Christians, with an apostle for their immediate instructor, adhered steadfastly to the employments in which conversion had found them; so that they were to be known by the striking description, "The saints that are of Cæsar's household."

But we have not yet exhausted the instructive truths which seem fairly deducible from the simple

statement of our text. We felt, as we insisted on the last lesson—the lesson as to the duty of remaining in a perilous position—that some might feel as though we required them to injure themselves for the benefit of others; and when it is the soul which is at stake, there may be doubts whether a sacrifice such as this can be lawful. We maintained it to be right, that Cæsar's household should not be deserted by the saints, because those saints, by remaining there, might be instrumental to the conversion of others to Christianity. But, surely, it is a Christian's first duty to give heed to his own growth in grace; how then can it be right, that, with the vague hope of benefiting others, he should continue amongst hindrances to his own spiritual advancement?

Brethren, of this we may be certain, that, where-soever God makes it a man's duty, there will He make it his interest, to remain. If He employ one of his servants in turning others from sin, He will cause the employment to conduce to that servant's holiness. Is there no indication of this in the words of our text? We lay the emphasis now upon "chiefly," "chiefly they that are of Cæsar's household." Of all the Roman Christians, the foremost in that love, which is the prime fruit of the Spirit, were those who were found amongst the courtiers and attendants of Nero, and who probably remained in his service, for the express purpose of endeavouring to promote the cause of the Gospel. Then it is very evident that these Christians sus-

tained no personal injury, but rather outstripped, in all which should characterize believers, others who might have seemed more advantageously placed.

Neither do we feel any surprise at this: it is just the result for which we might have naturally looked. Is it the absence of temptation, is it the want of trial, which is most favourable to the growth of vital Christianity? is it, when there is least to harass a Christian, to put him on his guard, or keep him on the alert, that he is most likely to become spiritually great? If so, then men were right in former times, who fancied it most for the interest of the soul that they should absolutely seclude themselves from the world, and, withdrawing to some lonely hermitage, hold communion with no being but God. But this we believe to have been an error. The anchorite, who never mixed with his fellow-men, and who was never exposed to the temptations resulting from direct contact with the world, might easily persuade himself of his superior sanctity, and as easily deceive himself. He might suppose his evil passions subdued, his corrupt propensities eradicated, whereas, the real state of the case might be, that the evil passions were only quiet because not solicited, and that the propensities were not urgent because there was nothing to excite them. Had he been brought away from his hermitage, and again exposed to temptation, it is far from improbable, that he, who had won to himself a venerated name by his austerities, and who was presumed to have quite mastered

the appetites and desires of an unruly nature, would have yielded to the solicitations with which he found himself beset, and given melancholy proof that the strength of his virtue lay in its not being tried. And, at all events, there is good ground for reckoning it an erroneous supposition, that piety must flourish best where least exposed to injury. The household of Cæsar may be a far better place for the growth of personal religion than the cell of a monk: in the one, the Christian has his graces put continually to the proof, and this tends both to the discovering and the strengthening them; in the other, there is comparatively nothing to exercise virtue, and therefore may its very existence be only a delusion.

Why then is the courtier to think, that, by making it his duty to remain in the dangerous atmosphere of a court, we require him to sacrifice himself for the benefit of others? or the servant, that, by bidding him stay in the irreligious family, we doom him to the being hindered in the spiritual race? Far enough from this. Let the remaining be matter of conscience, and the advantageousness shall be matter of experience. "The God of all grace," who has promised that his people shall not be tempted above that they are able, will bestow assistance proportioned to the wants. The constant exposure to danger will induce constant watchfulness: multiplied difficulties will teach the need of frequent prayer: the beheld wickedness of others will keep alive an earnest desire, that the earth may be "full

of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

And why, then, should not personal piety flourish? why should it be stunted? why, rather, should it not be more than commonly vigorous? Oh, let no man think that he cannot be expected to make great progress in religion, because he is obliged to be much in contact with wickedness, because his calling in life is one of great moral danger, keeping him associated with those who hate good, and employed on what tends to increase worldly-mindedness? It will probably be from situations such as this, that God shall gather into the kingdom of heaven the most eminent of his servants. It may not be from cloistered solitudes, where piety had but little to contend with, that the distinguished ones shall advance when Christ distributes the prizes of eternity—it may rather be from the court, where worldliness reigned; from the exchange, where gold was the idol; and from the family, where godliness was held in derision. Not that there may not be exalted piety where there has not been extraordinary trial. But the extraordinary trial, met in God's strength, which is always sufficient, will be almost sure to issue in such prayerfulness, such faith, such vigilance, such devotedness, as can hardly be looked for where there is but little to rouse, to alarm, and to harass. Therefore, let those be of good cheer, who, if pious at all, must be pious in spite of a thousand hindrances and disadvantages. Let these hindrances and disadvan-

tages only make them earnest in prayer and diligent in labour, and they will prove their best helps in working out salvation. Witness the "chiefly" of our text. There were none in Rome, in whom the flame of Christian love was so bright, as in those confined to the most polluted of atmospheres. God appointed them their station: they submitted in obedience to his will: and the result was, that the lamp, which you would have thought must have gone out in so pestilential an air, burnt stronger and clearer than in any other scene.

Look, then, upon your enemies as your auxiliaries, upon your dangers as your guardians, upon your difficulties as your helps. Christian men, and Christian women, ye of whom God asks most in asking you to be his servants, for you He reserves most, if, indeed, ye be "faithful unto death." The "chiefly" of the text may be again heard; they who have been first in godliness shall be first in glory: and when Christ is saying, "Come ye blessed of my Father," it may be with this addition, "chiefly they that were of Cæsar's household."

S E R M O N VI.

THE SLEEPLESS NIGHT.

ESTHER vi. 1.

“On that night could not the king sleep ; and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles ; and they were read before the king.”

It will be necessary for us to enter somewhat minutely into the circumstances connected with what is here mentioned, that you may be prepared for the inferences which we design to draw from the passage. The Book of Esther is among the most interesting of the narratives contained in the Old Testament, furnishing proofs, as remarkable as numerous, of the ever-watchful Providence of God. The king of the vast Persian Empire, of which Judea was at this time a province, had put from him his queen, in a moment of caprice and indignation, and advanced to her place a Jewess, named Esther, remarkable for her beauty, and, as it afterwards appeared, for her

piety and courage. This Esther, who had been left an orphan, had been brought up as his daughter by her cousin Mordecai, who, having been "carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity" under Nebuchadnezzar, had obtained some appointment in the royal household at Shushan. The relationship, however, between the two was not generally known; and Mordecai instructed Esther not to avow herself a Jewess, lest the circumstance might operate to her disadvantage. This very concealment appears to have been ordered of God, and had much to do with subsequent events.

The king had a favourite, named Haman the Agagite, a man of boundless ambition and pride, who acquired complete ascendancy over the monarch. Honours and riches were heaped on this minion; it was even ordered, as it would seem, that he should receive the same reverential prostrations as were rendered to the king, and which appear to have gone beyond mere tokens of respect, and to have been actually of an idolatrous character. Mordecai, whose religion forbade his giving, in any measure, to man what appertained to God, refused to join the other servants of the king in thus honouring Haman, and drew remark upon himself by remaining standing whilst they fell to the ground. Mordecai had been unjustly treated: he had claim to some portion, at least, of the honours conferred upon Haman, though there is no reason to suppose that anger, or envy, had any thing to do with his conduct towards the

favourite. He had been unjustly treated—for he had discovered a conspiracy, on the part of two of the royal chamberlains, to assassinate the king, and by apprising Esther of the bloody design, had prevented its execution. For this eminent service, however, he had obtained no reward; his merit was overlooked, and he still sat in the gate of the king.

But it sorely displeased Haman that Mordecai refused him the appointed tokens of reverence. It was nothing to this haughty man that he had reached the highest point to which a subject could aspire, so long as he had to encounter a Jew who would not fall prostrate before him. He must have his revenge—but it shall be a large revenge: it were little to destroy Mordecai alone; the reasons which produced the refusal from the individual might operate equally on the thousands of his countrymen: Mordecai then shall perish; but with him shall fall also the whole nation of the Jews.

It was a bold, as well as a bloody scheme, such as could not have been thought of except under an eastern despotism. Haman, however, knew that the lives of subjects were at the disposal of the king, so that if he could but possess himself of a royal edict against the Jews, he might compass his stern purpose, and exterminate the people. He sets, therefore, to work: but he will be religious in his wholesale massacre; he betakes himself to the casting of lots, that he may ascertain the day of the year most favourable to his project; and the lots—for “the whole dis-

posing thereof is of the Lord"—fixed him to a day eleven months distant, and, by thus delaying his atrocious scheme, gave time for its defeat.

He had no difficulty in obtaining the iniquitous decree from the luxurious and indolent monarch : he simply told him that there was a strange people scattered about his empire, whom it would be well to destroy, and offered to pay a large sum into the royal treasury, to balance any loss which their destruction might occasion. The king, without making the least inquiry, gave Haman his ring, which would authorize any measure which he might choose to adopt ; and Haman immediately circulated the sanguinary edict, to the great horror of the Jews, and the consternation of the whole empire. On this, Mordecai took measures for communicating with Esther, apprized her of the ruin which hung over her nation, and urged her to attempt intercession with the king. And whilst Esther was doing all in her power to arrange a favourable opportunity for pleading the cause of her people, there happened the singular circumstance recorded in the text : his sleep went from the king ; and in place of sending for music, or other blandishments, to soothe him to repose, he desired to hear portions of the chronicles of the empire. Amongst other things, the account of the conspiracy which Mordecai had discovered, was read to him ; this suggested inquiry as to whether Mordecai had been recompensed ; this again produced an order for his being instantly and sig-

nally honoured—an order which, as entrusted to Haman, was but the too certain herald of that favourite's downfall. Things now went on rapidly in favour of the Jews: the villany of Haman was disclosed to the king: immediate vengeance followed; and very shortly the people, who had stood within an ace of destruction, had gladness and light in their dwellings, and were all the more prosperous through the defeated plot of their enemies.

Now who can fail to perceive, who can hesitate to confess, the providence of God in the occurrences thus hastily reviewed? From the first, from the advancement of Esther to the throne, a higher than human agency was manifestly at work, to counteract a scheme as distinctly foreknown as though God had appointed, in place of only permitting, the sin. The conspiracy of the two chamberlains; the subsequent neglect of Mordecai; the distant season determined by the lot—these were all either ordered, or overruled, by God; and had a part, more or less direct, in frustrating a plot which aimed at nothing less than the extinction of the Jews. But perhaps the most memorable of the evidences of God's special Providence is that narrated in the text. There is nothing, indeed, surprising in the mere circumstance that the king passed a sleepless night; it may have arisen from many natural causes; and we are not at all required to hold that there was anything miraculous, anything out of the ordinary course, in his finding himself unable to sleep. But if there were

nothing expressly done to banish slumber from his eyes, we may safely say that advantage was taken of the sleeplessness of the king, and that it was suggested to him to do what he was little likely to have thought of. How improbable that, as he tossed from side to side, and could not find rest, he should have fancied the being read to out of the chronicles of the empire, a dry narrative, it may be, of facts with which he was already well acquainted, and which had little to interest a voluptuary like himself. When Darius had allowed Daniel to be cast into the lions' den, and was "sore displeased with himself" for what he had done, we read that "instruments of music were not brought before him;" as if, under ordinary circumstances, some such means as the cadences of melody would have been used to cheat him into slumber. But Ahasuerus, though the whole history proves him to have been a thorough sensualist, sent not for music, but for the chronicles of the kingdom; indeed, it was at the prompting of another spirit than his own, or, if it were but the whim of the moment, God made it instrumental to the most important of purposes.

Then, when the chronicles were brought, it was not likely that the part relating to Mordecai would be read. It might have been expected that the reader would turn to portions of the records which were not so well known, as better fitted to divert and interest the king. Besides, it is evident enough that Mordecai was no favourite with the other royal ser-

vants: they were disposed to pay court to Haman, and therefore to side with him in his quarrel with this refractory Jew. It was probable, then, that the reader would avoid the account of what Mordecai had done, not wishing that the king should be reminded of his signal, but unrequited, services. Yet, notwithstanding all the chances—to use common language—against the recital of Mordecai's deed, the narrative of this deed was brought before the king, and its effect was an inquiry as to the reward of the man who had been so eminently useful. And thus, by a succession of improbabilities, but not one of these improbabilities so great as to seem to require any supernatural interference, was a result brought round, or at least advanced, which mightily concerned, not only the Jewish nation, but the whole human race; for had the plan of Haman succeeded, and that people been exterminated whence Messiah was to spring, where would have been the promised redemption of this earth and its guilty inhabitants?

It is hardly affirming too much, to affirm that on the sleepless night of the Persian king was made to depend our rescue from everlasting death; at least, and undeniably, the restlessness of the king was one of those instruments through which God wrought in carrying on his purpose of redeeming our race through a descendant from David “according to the flesh.” Wonderful, that so simple, so casual, a circumstance should have had a direct bearing on the destinies of men from Adam to the very latest pos-

terity! wonderful, that the disturbed and broken rest of a single individual should have aided the reconciliation of the whole world to God! Let us contemplate the fact with yet closer attention. We wish to impress on you a strong sense of the ever-watchful Providence of God, of his power in overruling all things, so that they subserve his fixed purposes, and of the facility wherewith He can produce amazing results, through simple instrumentality. Whither then shall we lead you? Not to any strange or startling scene, where there are clear tokens of Divine interference and supremacy. Come with us merely to the couch of the Persian king, on that night when sleep went from his eyes; and remembering that this his sleeplessness was directly instrumental to the defeating the foul plot of Haman, let us consider what facts are established by the exhibition, and what practical lessons it furnishes to ourselves.

My brethren, examine your notions of God, and tell me whether you are not apt to measure the Supreme Being by standards established between man and man. The Divine greatness is regarded as that of some very eminent king: what would be inconsistent with the dignity of the potentate is regarded as inconsistent with the dignity of God; and what seems to us to contribute to that dignity, is carried up to the heavenly courts, or supposed to exist there in the highest perfection. We do not say that men are to be blamed for thus aiding their conceptions of

Deity by the facts and figures of an earthly estate. Limited as our faculties are, and unsuited to comprehend what is spiritual—confined, moreover, as we are to a material world—it is, in a measure, unavoidable that we should picture God in human shape, or rather, that we should take the standards which subsist amongst ourselves, and use them in representing, or setting forth, our Maker. But we should often gain a grander, and a juster, idea of God, by considering in what He differs from men, than by ascribing to Him, only in an infinite degree, what is found amongst ourselves. You may picture God as a potentate with boundless resources at his disposal, possessed of universal dominion, and surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand ministering spirits, each waiting to do his pleasure, and each mighty as that angel of death which prostrated, in a single night, the vast hosts of the Assyrian. There is nothing wrong in this representation of Deity, except that it must come immeasurably short of the reality: it is correct as far as it goes; but when we have heaped figure upon figure, attributing to God every conceivable instrument of power, we have, indeed, depicted him as mighty, in the sense in which an earthly monarch may be mighty; but, virtually, we can have made no approach towards the actual state of that omnipotent Being, who “sitteth on the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers.”

And, after all, it is not by putting unbounded

resources at the disposal of God, and representing Him as working through stupendous instrumentality, that we frame the highest notions of Him as a sovereign or ruler. Keep out of sight the unbounded resources, the stupendous instrumentality; survey Him as effecting what He wills through a mean and insignificant agency; and you more separate between the Creator and the creature, and therefore go nearer, it may be, to the true idea of God. There is something sublimer and more overwhelming in those sayings of Scripture, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength;" "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;" than in the most magnificent and gorgeous description of dominion and strength. This is just what the earthly potentate cannot do: he must have causes proportioned to effects, agencies commensurate with results; and it were utterly vain for him to think of ordaining strength from babes and sucklings, of confounding wise things with foolish, or mighty with weak. This is the prerogative of Deity alone; and because in this He is altogether separated from his creatures, therefore is this more a sign or attribute of Deity, than any assemblage of forces which Scripture may mention, or any celestial army which imagination can array.

Observe, then, how wonderful is God, in that He can accomplish great ends by insignificant means.

Christianity, for example, diffused through the instrumentality of twelve legions of angels, would have been immeasurably inferior, as a trophy of Omnipotence, to Christianity diffused through the instrumentality of twelve fishermen. When I survey the heavens, with their glorious troop of stars, and am told that the Almighty employs to his own majestic ends the glittering hosts, as they pursue their everlasting march, I experience no surprise: I seem to feel as though the spangled firmament were worthy of being employed by the Creator; and I expect a magnificent consummation from so magnificent an instrumentality. But show me a tiny insect, just floating in the breeze, and tell me, that, by and through that insect, will God carry forward the largest and most stupendous of his purposes, and I am indeed filled with amazement; I cannot sufficiently admire a Being, who, through that which I could crush with a breath, advances what I cannot measure with thought. And is there any thing strained or incorrect in associating with an insect the redemption of the world? Nay, not so. In saving the race whence Messiah was to spring, God worked through the disturbed sleep of the Persian monarch, and the buzz of an inconsiderable insect might have sufficed to break that monarch's repose.

You have another instance in Scripture of an attempt to destroy the chosen seed, and thus to frustrate the promises in which the whole world had interest. It was made by Pharaoh, king of Egypt,

who, not content with enslaving and oppressing the Israelites, sought to effect their extinction through destroying all their male children. And when God interfered on behalf of his people, it was with miracle and prodigy, with a mighty hand and a stretched out arm. Every one seems to feel that the agency was here adequate to the exigence: when the very scheme of redemption may be said to have been in jeopardy, no one is surprised, either that God came forth from his solitude clad in his might, or that, interposing in so awful a manner, He should have confounded and scattered his enemies. The interposition resembled what might have been looked for from an earthly king, who, finding his will obstructed in some province of his empire, should hasten thither with his armies, and subdue by superior might the rebels and antagonists. But when the peril was greater and more immediate, for certainly the project of Haman threatened worse than that of Pharaoh, there was no miracle—no prodigy: swarms of flies did not darken the land, though perhaps a single fly was made use of by God. Yet who does not perceive that herein was the wonderfulness of God more displayed, than in all the supernatural terrors which devastated Egypt? Let it be, that God caused Ahasuerus to be sleepless, or only knew that he would be; that He prompted him to send for the chronicles, or only knew that he would send; that He secretly suggested to the reader what parts to take, or simply foresaw his selection—in either case, what a tissue

of insignificant causes is here! but, at the same time, what a Being must that be, who could hang a world on such a web, any thread of which might have been broken by a thought, but not without deranging and dislocating the whole! To have interfered with visible miracle, would have been nothing compared to the thus secretly and silently operating through natural and inconsiderable things. Indeed, it was a display of Deity, when the oppressors of Israel quailed before a power which strewed the earth with ruin, and shrouded the heavens in darkness. But it accords with our notions of greatness, that mighty means should be employed to mighty ends: if God have at his disposal the thunder, the storm, and the pestilence, we marvel not, that, by employing such artillery, He should frustrate the plots of the enemies of his Church. Can He dispense with this artillery? can He work without miracles, when some great crisis arrives, and the counsels of Eternity seem on the eve of defeat? Indeed He can. He is too great to find any instrument little. He can work with the insect's wing just as well as with the Archangel's. And, after adoring Him, as He passes through Egypt in the chariot of his strength, working out the emancipation of his people by portents and plagues, I fall before Him as yet more amazing in wisdom and power, when I find the bloody purpose of Haman defeated through such instrumentality as this; "The king could not sleep, and he com-

manded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles, and they were read before the king.”

Now we omitted a circumstance, in our hasty summary of the facts of the history, which ought to be pointed out, that you may thoroughly perceive the workings of divine Providence. At the very moment that the king was listening to the chronicles of the empire, the wicked Haman was standing in the court, waiting for an audience. He had risen early that he might prefer a request to the king, a request for the immediate execution of Mordecai. At the suggestion of his wife, he had caused a gallows to be erected, and now sought the royal permission for hanging the object of his inveterate hatred. Only remember with what facility the king had granted Haman’s request, when it asked the destruction of thousands, and you will hardly think it likely that he would have shown any hesitation in consenting to the death of a solitary individual, and that, too, an individual already doomed by the issued decree. And if Mordecai had fallen, it does not indeed necessarily follow that Esther would have failed in her intercession with the king: but it is not too much to suppose that she would have been staggered and paralyzed through the loss of her kinsman and adviser, and perhaps have taken his death as an evidence of the uselessness of resisting the insolent Haman. Mordecai was, humanly speaking, the great obstruction to the execution of Haman’s

plot; and, this having been removed, unless some new counteracting engines had been set at work by God, the whole nation of the Jews must have simultaneously perished. Thus it was, you perceive, precisely at the critical moment that his sleep went from the king; the sleepless night saved Mordecai, and Mordecai saved the nation. We have not, then, put the case too strongly, in representing the scheme of the redemption of the world, as having depended on the restlessness of the monarch of Persia. We do not, of course, mean to say, that, had the king slept through the night, God would not have employed some other instrumentality in furthering his purpose of mercy towards men. But we have only to do with instrumentality actually employed: and, indeed, it is unbecoming in us even to suppose the case that the king might have slept; for this is to suppose that God's foreknowledge might have been at fault, a contingency having been reckoned upon which had never arisen. It was clearly, therefore, so ordered by Providence, that the deliverance of the Jews, and, with it, the redemption of the world, should hinge on the fact of his sleep going on one particular night from Ahasuerus, the monarch of Persia.

And, having already called on you to admire the wonderfulness of God, in that He could operate to so mighty an end through so inconsiderable an agency, we would have you carefully observe how little there was which could be called supernatural

interference; how simply, without any violence, the divine Providence effected its purpose. Now that the whole is over, we can clearly trace the hand of God: but, whilst the matter was in progress, we might have discerned nothing but ordinary and every-day events, such as afforded no sign of the interference of Deity. We have not taken on ourselves to decide whether God actually caused, or only foreknew, the king's sleepless night; whether He turned the king's mind towards the chronicles of the empire, or merely foresaw its direction. But let it be supposed, as is sufficiently probable, that there was more than foreknowledge, that God banished sleep from the king's eyes and directed his thoughts to the chronicles, how natural was the whole thing! how little interference was there with the usual course of events! No one could have suspected that a divine agency was at work: it was no ways singular that the king should be restless: no miracle was required to explain his choosing to hear the records of his empire: every thing was just what might have equally happened, had matters been left to themselves, in place of having been disposed and directed by God.

We wish you to observe this very carefully, because it goes to the setting under a right point of view the utility of prayer, which is often objected against as though it sought miracles, or expected God to interrupt, at our call, the established course and order of things. The Jews, at the bidding of

Esther, had given themselves to fasting and prayer, supplicating of the Almighty that she might be favourably received of the king, and thus enabled to adopt measures for discomfiting Haman. And independently on this set supplication on behalf of the queen, we may be sure, that, no sooner had the edict gone forth which doomed them to death, than the Jews betook themselves to prayer to the God of their fathers, imploring of Him that He would vanquish their foes, and not suffer the promises to fail, of which, for centuries, they had been the depository. And perhaps they looked for visible and miraculous interference in answer to their prayers: it had been God's course, in other emergencies, to make bare his arm in defence of his people: might He not now be expected to appear in his terrors, and scatter, by the brightness of his presence, whatsoever had leagued against his Church and Himself? But they looked in vain, if they looked for sensible evidence that God had not forgotten his covenant: there came no prodigy to sustain their sinking spirits: if Mordecai appeared raised up, as Moses had been, to counsel and lead them in their difficulties; alas! he had not the rod of the lawgiver to wave over the land, and make oppressors tremble.

Was God, then, not hearkening to prayer? was He not intending, or preparing, to answer it? Indeed, his ear was open to the cry of his people, and the event sufficiently showed, that He had, all along, been working for their safety. But, as though to

prove to us, that, even in the worst extremity, He may interpose on our behalf, and nevertheless not derange the common order of things; He frustrated the apparently secure plot of Haman without the least approach to a miracle. And do you not perceive what encouragement this affords in the matter of prayer, and how it scatters the objection which numbers would urge? The scorner would tell me of fixed and immutable laws, according to which things must proceed in regular succession and train: he would persuade me of the utter absurdity of addressing petitions to God, seeing that, if He answer them, it must be by interfering with what is settled and constant, by the working of miracles, which, from their very nature, He cannot often work. But it is a false statement. I do not look for miracle to be wrought in answer to prayer—though, all the while, I thoroughly believe, that, were a case to arise in which nothing short of miracle would meet the circumstances of a servant of God, the miracle would not be withheld: stars shall forsake their courses, the sun and the moon shall put on sackcloth, ere any thing shall fail which God has promised to the righteous, and which is needful to their steadfastness or progress. But it is not required that there should be miracle, in order to our prayers being granted; neither does the granting them suppose that God is variable, or changes in his purposes. There was no miracle in his causing Ahasuerus to pass a sleepless night: a little heat in the atmosphere, or the buzzing

of an insect, might have produced the result; and philosophy, with all its sagacity, could not have detected any interruption of the known laws of nature. Neither were God's purposes variable, though it may have actually depended on the importunity of prayer, whether or not the people should be delivered. God's appointment may have been, that He would break the king's sleep if prayer reached a certain intensesness; that He would not break it, if it came below that intensesness: and surely, this would accord equally with two propositions—the first, that the Divine purposes are fixed and immutable; the second, that, notwithstanding this fixedness and immutability, they may be affected by human petitions, and therefore leave room for importunate prayer.

And thus I am mightily encouraged in all the business of prayer by the broken rest of the Persian king. Comparatively, I should not be encouraged, were I told that what disquieted the monarch had been the standing of a spectre by his bedside, an unearthly form, which, in unearthly accents, had upbraided him with leaving Mordecai unrequited. Here would have been miracle, a departure from ordinary laws; and I know that such departure must be necessarily rare, and could hardly be looked for in any exigence of mine own. But when I observe that the king's rest was disturbed without anything supernatural; that all which God had to do, in order to arrange a great deliverance for his people, was to cause a sleepless night, but so to cause it that no

one could discern his interference; then, indeed, I learn that I may not be asking what the world counts miracle, though I ask what transcends all power but divine. It may be by natural processes that God effects what might pass for supernatural results. Shall I not cry for deliverance from the dungeon into which a tyrant has cast me, or from the tempest which has overtaken me? Shall I be silent, because it were like asking for miracle, to ask that the prison doors might be loosened, or for interruption of the known laws of nature, to entreat that the agitated elements might be hushed? Nay, not so. God, who succoured the Jews through giving one man a sleepless night, may, by the dropping of a pin, incline the tyrant to release me, or, by a feather's weight in those laboratories which science never penetrated, repress the rushings of the storm. I am delivered from the dungeon, I am saved from the tempest, without exciting the surprise of the world, because without any palpable derangement of the common order of things; but nevertheless through an express answer to prayer, or a direct interference on the part of the Almighty.

Oh, there is something in this which should be wondrously encouraging to all who feel their insignificance, and can scarce venture to think that the high and glorious God will exert his omnipotence on their behalf. If the registered deliverances, vouchsafed to the Church, were all deliverances which had been effected through miracles, we might question

whether they afforded any precedent, on which creatures like ourselves could justly rest hope. We dare not think that for us, for our safety or advancement, armed squadrons will be seen on the heavens, or the earth be convulsed, or the waters turned into blood. But look from Israel delivered from Pharaoh to Israel delivered from Haman, and we are encouraged to believe that God will not fail even us in our extremity, seeing that He could save his people through such a simple and unsuspected process as this: "On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles."

But we would now lead you along a train of thought quite different from the preceding, but naturally flowing from the circumstances under review. We wish you again, and more distinctly, to observe, that, even on the supposition that God produced, and did not merely overrule what took place, there was nothing to excite a consciousness of Divine interference: the whole process was so natural that its subject might never have suspected the special workings of God. It cannot for a moment be alleged, that any thing like compulsion was laid upon the king, that his free agency was destroyed, so that he was necessitated, against his will, to adopt a particular course. It was not indeed optional with Ahasuerus whether or not he would be wakeful; neither was it at his own choice, whether or not the thought should cross his mind of sending for the

chronicles of the empire; but we may fairly suppose that he could have resisted this thought had he pleased. He might have said to himself, "These chronicles will never soothe me to sleep: I will try something better suited to my purpose"—and thus might he have withstood the impulse, and lost the opportunity of discovering and correcting his faults. We do not of course mean, as we have hinted before, that Haman's plot would not have been defeated, had the king not done according to the suggestion of God. God designed that the plot should be defeated; and He would, therefore, have been sure to bring to bear an adequate instrumentality. But the point under consideration is, that the agency employed on the king was so natural, so undistinguishable from the workings of his own mind, that he could never have suspected a Divine interference, and must have been perfectly at liberty either to do, or not to do, as the secret impulse prescribed.

And in this, my brethren, we have a striking illustration of God's ordinary course in his dealings with men—those dealings, we specially mean, through which He would effect their conversion or renewal. If you examine theoretically into the consistence of human liberty with the operations of Divine grace—if, that is, you seek to show, with thorough precision, that the influences of God's Spirit on our minds in no degree interfere with free agency—it is possible that you will involve yourselves in a labyrinth, and seek vainly for the clue by which you might be

extricated. But, practically, there is no difficulty whatsoever in the matter: we may fairly say, that, whilst suggestions are secretly generated, and impulses applied to our minds, we are thoroughly at liberty to act as we choose: it depends on ourselves, on the exercise of our own will, whether the suggestions be cherished or crushed, whether the impulses be withstood or obeyed. And we know nothing of which it is more important that men be aware, than of the naturalness, so to speak, of the Spirit's operations; for many are disposed to wait for what they count supernatural influence—influence which shall palpably not be of this earth, and which shall virtually leave them no freedom of choice. But without denying that cases sometimes occur, in which the operations of the Spirit thus force attention to their origin, it is unquestionable that his ordinary operations are just such as may pass for the workings of our own minds: there is nothing in them to tell us, that we are, at that moment, being subjected to the agency of Omnipotence; nothing to excite the startling conviction, that we are verily wrought upon by that renovating power, which is to mould out of fallen humanity a habitation for Deity Himself. And because the operations of the Spirit are commonly not distinguishable from those of our own minds, the danger is very great of their being overlooked or despised; and the duty is, therefore, most pressing, of our being ever on the watch for his suggestions and impulses.

The position of the unconverted man is often precisely that of the King Ahasuerus. There is a restlessness, an uneasiness, for which he cannot give any definite reason; it has come upon him, he hardly knows whence; and he turns from side to side, expecting to recover his moral indifference or composure. But still his sleep goes from him, and he bethinks him of measures for wooing it back. When he has been similarly situated before, he has perhaps had recourse to the fascinations of the world; he has summoned pleasure with her lyre, and her syren strains have soothed him into quiet. Shall he take the same course now? It would be natural that he should; but he feels a sort of disposition to try another mode; it is secretly suggested to him that the book of the record of the chronicles might give him some repose, that the Bible might hush his agitation, were it read to him by those whose office it is to press home its truths. And thus is he literally situated as was the Persian king on that eventful night, when the fate of the Jews, and of the world, seemed to hang upon a thread. He is acted on as was the king; and there is nothing to prevent his resisting as the king might have resisted. He may say to himself, "The Bible is a dull book, preachers are melancholy persons; I will try something more likely to dissipate my fears, and restore my composure: give me the romance, or the comedy, rather than the book of the chronicles; give me my jovial companions, rather than the ministers of religion."

Ahasuerus might have done this, and thereby would he have resisted promptings which were not of his own mind, though they gave no note of supernatural origin, and have lost the opportunity of freeing his kingdom from a great impending calamity. And the sinner may do this: he may withstand a suggestion, which seems only to spring from a disturbed mind, though in truth to be traced to the Spirit of God; and thus may he throw away a golden opportunity of learning how to flee from everlasting wrath.

The special thing forced on the conscience of Ahasuerus through the book of the chronicles, was, that there was one who had done him great service in saving him from death, and whom he had hitherto requited with neglect. And it is the very same thing which might be forced on the conscience of the sinner through the reading or hearing of the Bible. There is one who has done for him what thought cannot measure, ransoming him, by "the death of the cross," from everlasting pains; but he has hitherto refused to acknowledge this Saviour, and has given Him, in return, only hatred or contempt. So accurately is a case of most common occurrence, that of the unconverted man moved by God's Spirit to give heed to the Gospel of Christ, portrayed in that of the Persian king, prompted, in his restlessness, to hear the chronicles of the empire. And what we would again and again impress upon you is, that you are not to think of recognizing the operations of the Spirit of God by any supernatural tokens, as though,

whenever that agent is at work in your breasts, you must be aware of his presence, and able to distinguish his movements from those of the conscience and the will. The secret uneasiness, the impulse to prayer, the sense of something wrong, the disposition to hear the word of God—these may not startle you by their strangeness; these may seem to you quite natural, as naturally produced as suggestions of an opposite character—but know ye of a truth, that these are what the Holy Ghost causes; that these may perhaps be all which the Holy Ghost will cause; and, therefore, that if ye will not yield to these, and will not act on these, there is a fearful probability of your being forsaken of God, and left to your own devices. Wait not for miracles—God’s ordinary workings are through very simple means. We do not read of any thunderclap which awakened Ahasuerus; he was restless, but perhaps could give no account of his restlessness. If he had been asked, he would probably have mentioned the heat of the weather, or over-excitement, or something of which he had eaten. But, all the while, God was in that sleeplessness, for which so many common causes might have been assigned. And there must be those of you who already know, or who will know, something of a moral uneasiness which might admit of various explanations. There has been no thunderclap—yet the man cannot sleep; and he will perhaps account for it from some loss in his family, or some disappointment in trade, or some deficiency in health.

But God is in that uneasiness, that disquietude, which shows an inability to settle down in present things, and a secret craving for higher and better. Well then—whensoever such a season shall visit any amongst you, let them be specially heedful of what may be suggested to their minds: they are not disturbed for nothing, but that they may be prompted and urged towards religion—no music, no revelry, no blandishments: let the records of the chronicles of the kingdom of Heaven be searched, and they shall learn how the snare may be broken, and beautiful peace be permanently secured.

S E R M O N V I I .

THE WELL OF BETHLEHEM.

2 SAMUEL xxiii. 15, 16, 17.

“ And David longed, and said, Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate! And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it.

WE are not to regard the Scriptural histories as mere registers of facts, such as are commonly the histories of eminent men: they are rather selections of facts, suitableness for purposes of instruction having regulated the choice. In human biography, you may say of much that is recorded, that it is inserted only because it happened, and because, therefore, its omission would have destroyed the integrity of the

narrative. But we do not suppose that the same may be said of Scriptural biography: a fact is not recorded merely because it occurred, as though the object were to give the full life of some distinguished individual; a fact is rather chosen for relation, out of many which are omitted, because exhibiting some point, whether in human conduct, or the Divine dealings, on which it is important that attention be turned.

Occasionally, indeed, and perhaps more frequently than is commonly thought, it is because the fact has a typical character that it is selected for insertion: it prefigures, or symbolically represents, something connected with the scheme of Redemption, and on this account has found place in the sacred volume. Neither is it unusual for the recorded fact to answer to both these descriptions; being instructive in itself, and serving also as an emblem of truths that were then taught only by shadows and types. And whether, in any given instance, it be that the thing narrated is instructive in itself, or significative of what God had yet but partially disclosed; or whether it may lay claim to both characters; we ought, at least, to be careful that we content not ourselves with apprehending the facts, but study diligently what lessons they may convey, and what types they may contain.

We make these general remarks from a fear that, in regard especially of the Old Testament narratives, there is a habit with many Christians of reading

Scriptural histories as registers of facts, rather than as collections of lessons. The interesting character of the narratives themselves is often likely to induce, or strengthen, this habit; the mind becomes so engaged with the story, that the instruction is disregarded, or the figure overlooked. There are others besides children who can be pleased with the fable, and never think of the moral. And if we fail to search the Scriptural narratives for lessons and types, it is evident that we shall practically take away from great part of the Bible its distinctive character as a record of spiritual truth; whilst, on the other hand, by always looking for what always exists—material of instruction—we may give to histories the nature of homilies, and find the events in an individual's life prophetic of things in which the whole world has interest.

We hope to show you, as we proceed with our discourse, that the narrative which we have now selected from the Old Testament, forms no exception to the rule, but rather signally illustrates its truth. It is exactly one of those narratives which are likely to be read and admired for the beauty of the facts, rather than studied for the worth of the lessons. It lays immediate and strong hold on the imagination, having about it that air of chivalry, we might almost say romance, which ordinarily so captivates and dazzles the fancy. You can hardly read it and not have before you all the scenery of the tented field, with the mailed champions and the

floating banners. The royal warrior, David, is exhausted with the fight; he has been in the thick of the struggle with the Philistines, and is now faint with thirst. In this his weariness and languor, he is heard to breathe a passionate wish for water from the well of Bethlehem, between which and himself lay the Philistines, so that the well could be reached only by breaking through their line. But amongst his followers were men as attached as intrepid; with hearts devoted to their chieftain, and hands prepared to attempt even impossibilities at his bidding. Three of the most distinguished of these followers heard the wish which David expressed. There was no command given: but with them a wish had the force of a command; and pausing not to count the peril, they rushed against the foe, resolved to carve themselves a passage. It was like rushing on destruction—what will their courage and strength avail against a multitude! they will be borne down in the unequal struggle; and even if they reach the well their retreat will be cut off, and they must perish in the effort to return. And yet—so did the Almighty favour the bold enterprise—they succeed in breaking through the host: you may trace their course by the stir, the tumult, and the crash; the enemy falls in heaps before them; now they are by the side of the cold flowing fountain: they stay not to quench their own thirst: they dip, it may be, a helmet in the waters, and hasten, with that warrior's cup, to attempt a second time the passage. Perhaps the

Philistines scarcely offered fresh resistance; these three men may have seemed to them more than mortal; they may have divided at their approach, and allowed them to return unopposed to the army of Israel.

And David must have been aware of this desperate sally; he must have known that the choicest of his warriors had thrown themselves, to all appearance, on certain death, in hopes of gratifying his wish; and deep must have been his anxieties, and fervent his prayers, for those whom his inconsiderateness had placed in such peril. But the shout of his troops tells him that his brave captains are safe; they approach, stained with the blood of the Philistines, and perhaps with their own: they bow before their king, present the sparkling draught, and ask no reward but the pleasure of seeing him refreshed. And David holds the helmet in his hands, but raises it not to his lips: the thirst consumes him, for it has been aggravated through the feverish dread that the bold men would perish; but the water, fresh and pure though it was, looked to him like the blood of those who had jeopardied their lives; he felt compunction at having rashly given utterance to a wish which had produced so daring a deed; and he will punish himself for the fault; he refuses to drink, and pours the water on the ground as a libation to the Lord.

What a picture! Every one is familiar with the story of our own warrior, who, mortally wounded,

and parched with the death-thirst, received a cup of water, but observing, as he raised it to his lips, the eye of a dying soldier rest wistfully upon it, handed it to him and bade him drink it, as needing it yet more than himself. But we know not whether the history before us do not present a still finer subject for the painter. It does not seem as though David had to choose between quenching his own thirst and that of another. There may have been no gasping warrior at his feet to move sympathy by the glassy eye and the clotted lip. It was simply at the suggestion of conscience that he put from him the longed-for draught; and there was all the more of greatness, because there was apparently so little to prompt the self-denial.

But we need not take pains to give interest and colouring to the narrative. The risk, as we have hinted, is all the other way—that you may be so attracted by the chivalrous circumstances, by the displayed bravery and magnanimity, as to think nothing of homely and personal lessons with which the registered incidents are assuredly fraught. We have, therefore, now to engage you exclusively with these lessons. We wish you to observe what there may have been to blame, and what to approve, in the conduct of David; and to note, with like attention, the conduct of his servants. This sufficiently defines what we have to attempt through the remainder of our discourse; we will take, first, the conduct of the three warriors, and, secondly, that of

David, and examine what, in each case, there may be whether to condemn or to copy.

Now the three warriors must be surveyed as servants of David, men engaged to obey his commands, and execute his will to the utmost of their power. And their conduct then appears very admirable, as far removed as can well be imagined from that calculating and niggardly obedience, which betrays a disposition to do the least possible, to render as little to a master as that master can be prevailed on to accept. We need not touch the question as to whether these warriors were justified in running such a risk, whether it were unlawful, or not, to make the attempt to which they were prompted by the expressed wish of David. It may have been unlawful; there must have been a point at which obedience to God would have forbidden obedience to their king: but we have no means for accurately judging whether this point had been reached in the case now before us. We may, therefore, wave all reference to the right, or the wrong, of the resolve to cut a path to the waters of Bethlehem; we have simply to do with the power which a mere wish of David had over his servants, for we may hence derive a lesson for all servants, whether of God or of man.

You are to observe that David issued no command. He might have summoned the bravest of his battalions, and bidden them attempt the forcing a passage to the well; but nothing of the kind was done: he simply uttered a wish, without, perhaps,

thinking that he should be overheard, and certainly without designing that it should be interpreted as a command. But the wish was sufficient for bold and true-hearted men, and they instantly faced death to attempt its gratification. And we say of these servants, thus yielding as ready an obedience to an overheard wish as could have been rendered to the most positive order, that they rebuke many of ourselves, who, whether it be their Creator, or their fellow-creatures, by whom they are employed, seem only anxious to reduce their service to the smallest possible amount. There is an example set by these warriors to every man who is called on for obedience, which fits the history before us to be inscribed on our kitchens, our shops, and our churches. The example lies in their not having waited for a command, but acted on a wish; and there is no man to whom the term servant applies—and it applies to every man, at least with reference to God—who would not do well to ponder the example, and consider whether he be not yet far below such a model.

If you take the case of servants, as the term is commonly applied, is not their service, for the most part, a sort of labour to do no more than they can help, an endeavour to earn their wages with as little outlay of toil as their employers will consent to remunerate? Servants, even servants “professing godliness,” seem to have practically but little remembrance of the precept of St. Paul, “not with eyeservice as men-pleasers.” It is almost all “eye-ser-

vice," and flags in proportion as inspection is withdrawn. It is a rare thing to find a servant who will diligently obey your commands; but where shall we look for one who will carefully consult your wishes? And we do not know that a more annoying argument is to be found against the advantageousness of a diffused Christian education, than is apparently furnished by a fact which it is not easy to gainsay, that, in place of an improved race of servants having resulted from an improved system of general instruction, we have less diligent, less obliging, and less trustworthy domestics. We are sure as to the unsoundness of the argument, because we are sure, on unassailable principles, that the knowledge of God in Christ will make men, from the prince to the peasant, fitter for whatsoever duties appertain to their station. But, nevertheless, when the appeal is to results, to the testimony of experience, not of theory, it does involve the advocate of national education in no ordinary difficulty, that the opponent can enter our households and ask, with much semblance of truth, what, comparatively, has become of those attached, stedfast, and conscientious servants, who had no interest separate from their master's, and no wish but that of executing his? And servants, who have enjoyed all the superior advantages of modern days, and yet are palpably inferior to the servants of former—restless, rude, dishonest—little know how much they may contribute towards such disgust amongst the rich at the instruction of the

poor, as will prompt an endeavour to re-establish the ignorance which consisted with something praiseworthy, as preferable to the knowledge which threatens to issue in confusion.

Neither is it only to servants, in the common sense of the word, that the example before us applies. The same holds good generally of the employed, whatever the nature of the employment. It ought to be the ruling principle with him who serves another in any capacity, to serve him upon principle, to identify himself with his employer, and to have the same eye to his interests as though they were his own. If a man buy my time, and I do not devote to him that time, there is robbery as actual as though he had bought my merchandize and I then sold it to another. If he pay me for my labour, and I in any measure withhold it, then, up to that measure, there is as palpable fraud as if he bargained for my-goods and I used a false balance. The indolent clerk, the idle shopman, the careless agent—I see no moral difference between these and the grossly dishonest who tamper with the property of their employers. And if a general rule be required for the guidance of those who are in any kind of service, we fetch it from the example of David's three captains, with whom a wish had all the force of a command. It is not that this rule will furnish specific direction in each specific case; but that he, who acts up to it, will be keeping in exercise the motives and dispositions, which will ensure the right course under all

possible circumstances. He who consults wishes as well as commands, or with whom a known wish is as binding as an express command, will necessarily feel at all times under the eye of his employer; or, rather, will know no difference when that eye is upon him and when turned away. His whole aim will be to act for the employer as the employer would act for himself; and it is evident that nothing can be added to such a description, if you wish to include singleness of purpose, sincerity, diligence, and faithfulness.

And you have only to contrast, in your own minds, the servant who will do nothing but what is positively, and, in so many words, commanded, and another who watches the very looks of his master, that he may read his wishes and take them for laws, to assure yourselves that the feature of good service which we derive from the conduct of the captains of David rather gives the whole character than a solitary mark. Yea, consider men in general as the servants of God—of God who expressly says, “I will guide thee with mine eye,” as though a look were to suffice; and this feature will distinguish the true and the earnest from the hypocritical and the lukewarm. Let us ask ourselves whether, unhappily, it be not the too common disposition of those who make profession of godliness, to pare down as much as possible the service required at their hands, to calculate how small a sacrifice, and how slight an endurance, will consist with their being reckoned amongst the members of Christ? In place of a generous zeal to give

up everything for God, and such a fear of offending Him as would make them avoid what is indifferent lest they indulge in what is wrong, men are apt to compute how far they may venture in compliance with the world, how near they may go to the forbidden thing, and yet not lose the distinctive character of the people of Christ. It should not content the Christian that such or such an indulgence is not prohibited by the letter of the law; he should search whether it be not prohibited by the spirit. In cases where there really may be a doubt as to the lawfulness, he should determine for the course which is the most likely to be right; and, if the scales hang even, for that to which he has the less inclination. This would be true Christian obedience, an obedience of which love is the law. God dealeth with us as with children rather than servants—not laying down an express precept for every possible case, but supposing in us a principle which will always lead to our considering what will be pleasing to Himself, and to our taking his pleasure as our rule. And just as the affectionate child will watch the countenance of the parent, obeying what he reads there as well as what he hears from the lip, so should the Christian search for the least indication of God's will and give it all the force of a positive statute.

But can we say that we do this? Can we deny, that, for the most part, we rather compute how little God will take than how much we can give; what may be withheld, than what surrendered? That a

thing is doubtful, does not make us shun it as though it were wrong: we are more disposed, under the plea of its being dubious, to adopt it as right. It is not sufficient for us, that God is likely to be better pleased if we abstain than if we indulge: we urge the want of express command, and are secretly gratified that it does not exist. Alas, then, how are we reproved by the warriors of David! What Christians should we be, if, with them, a wish were law enough to arm us against danger and death! Go in thought to the field of battle, where Israel is ranged against the Philistine, when you may feel inclined to evade a painful duty under the plea of its not being distinctly enjoined. When you would excuse yourselves from making a sacrifice, foregoing an indulgence, or attempting a difficulty, by urging, that though it might be acceptable to God, at least He has not made it indispensable, observe what the servants of an earthly king could do in the absence of command, and let the servants of a heavenly blush to do less. Who are these that rush upon the enemy, as though they knew nothing of danger and bore a charm against death? We see three warriors press along the plain; their whole demeanour is that of those charged with some fearful commission; the fate of a kingdom has surely been given into their keeping; they are urging forwards with the desperateness of men, bidden, on some authority which they dare not resist, to attempt an enterprise involving the safety of thousands. Not so: these warriors might have

remained inactive and yet been guilty of no positive disobedience to their leader. They have received no directions obliging them to draw the sword and hew a passage. They were just in the position in which you yourselves often are, with no command from a master, but with some intimation of a wish. And they are but setting an example to the warriors of Christ—an example as to the taking every indication of the wish, as an expression of the will of our Lord, seeing that they are cutting their way through the hosts of the Philistine, not because they have heard David exclaim, “Unsheath the sword, and dare the foe;” but only because they have heard him say, “Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem.”

But let us now pass from the conduct of the servants to that of David, in which there is matter, as it would seem, for blame as well as praise. You may be sure, that, if we have spoken with something like severity of servants, it has not been in forgetfulness of how much, after all, the goodness of the servant depends upon the master. We never hear an instance of a domestic growing old in one family, without feeling that it tells well for both sides; if a good master will not keep a bad servant long, neither will a bad master long keep a good. It must, in truth, be through a mutual system of forbearance and accommodation, that anything like harmony is maintained in the several relations of life: to expect always to prescribe, and never to

concede, shows an ignorance of human character and condition, which is sure to be visited with opposition and thwarting. They who look to be obeyed cheerfully, must take heed that they command judiciously; the greater the known readiness to comply with their wishes, the greater should be the caution that those wishes be always reasonable and just.

And herein was David much in fault; for, knowing the devotedness of his followers, their attachment to his person, and their uncalculating bravery in his cause, he should have been all the more careful to give utterance to neither a command nor a wish which he had not well weighed, or with which he did not desire a literal compliance. It was not fitting in a man, who had learnt, by experience, that the warm hearts about him would obey his very look, to express a rash longing—and such, at least, was that for water from Bethlehem. We have no reason to suppose that there was no water in the camp, or that none could have been procured from more accessible springs. Perhaps the well of Bethlehem was celebrated for its water; or perhaps David, as having been born and brought up in Bethlehem, had a special affection for the fountain of which he had drunk in his youth. This longing for the well of Bethlehem in an hour of danger and strife, may have been one of those instances of the travelling back of the mind to the days and scenes of boyhood, which are so common and so touching amid the woes and struggles of more advanced life; the fields where we

once played seeming to mock us by their greenness, and the well-remembered waters and trees sparkling and waving before the eye, as though to reproach our having abandoned what was so peaceful and pure for the whirl and din of the world. It may have been thus with David: his circumstances were now harassing and perplexed, and, as he felt his difficulties and perils, the imagery of his youth may have come thronging before him—himself a shepherd-boy, and his flock grazing on the bank of a quiet glassy stream; and it may have been but an expression of something like regret that days were so changed, when he exclaimed, “Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate.”

But, whatever were the uppermost feeling in the mind of David, we may fall back upon our assertion, that, circumstanced as he was, it ought not to have been expressed. Indeed, even had he not had such reason to know that those around him were on the watch for the intimation of his wishes, he would not have been warranted in giving words to a desire, that others would risk life just to gratify himself. There is all the difference between the feeling and the expressing a desire; we are not necessarily answerable for the former—we must be for the latter: even as an evil thought may be darted into the mind, we cannot tell whence, and we be innocent notwithstanding; but the thought cannot be embodied in speech and we not be guilty. If David's wish were

harmless, as breathed only to himself, it was not so as declared to his servants: he must have known its gratification impossible, except at the risk of many lives. Not that we suppose that David entertained any thought of his wish being acted upon; in all likelihood it never crossed his mind that the desperate sally would be made. But it is precisely in this that he was to blame; it ought to have crossed his mind: he would not issue a command which he did not mean to be obeyed; neither, circumstanced and surrounded as he was, should he have hinted at a wish, if he did not design the gratification to be attempted.

And it is here that we may obtain some general rules which all who have authority would do well to adopt. You see that, in proportion as you are faithfully and affectionately served, you are bound to be careful how you issue a command or breathe a desire. Take it as the perfection of a servant, to be anxious only to know, that he may do, his master's will; and it is the perfection of a master, to manifest no will but what his servant may be able, and with good conscience, to perform. There can be no tyranny greater, and none more ungenerous, than that which, taking advantage of the condition or attachment of a domestic, imposes duties which are too severe or tasks which are unlawful. I may feel that a servant is either so dependent upon me or so devoted to my wishes, that he will tell a lie at my bidding, and assure the visitor that I am from home when he

knows me in the house. But what is to be said of my baseness, my cruelty, in prescribing to a fellow-creature over whom I have some kind of power, that he should do what he cannot do, and not offend the God of truth! I may not actually mean him to tell a lie; I may suppose that there is a sort of conventional understanding in society which causes a certain sense to be put on the phrase which I dictate: but it is too much to expect that the fine-drawn distinction should be perceived by the servant; his feeling must be that he has told a direct falsehood for my sake; and it is hardly reasonable to require that he should not, at other times, tell one for his own.

And this is but a particular case, which may be taken to illustrate the general rule. The general rule is, that, in every command, in every wish, there be due consideration for the ability, the comfort, and the conscience of the domestic. No longing for the water of Bethlehem, if it cannot be had but by strength unduly tasked, time so engrossed that none remains for prayer, or principle so disregarded that man's law supersedes God's.

Neither is this all which should be gathered or inferred from the circumstances under review. You see how easily what was never meant as a command may be received as such, where there is affectionate watchfulness amongst friends and attendants. Then what care should there be, that nothing be said in joke which may be taken in earnest, nothing even

hinted at as our belief or desire, which we would not have acted on by those who hear the words. It is specially to children that this remark applies; for they may be supposed to have all that submissiveness to authority and that willingness to oblige, which distinguished David's warriors, as well as that inability of discriminating a casual expression from an actual direction, which seems equally to have belonged to the men who felt themselves bidden to attempt the passage to Bethlehem. The child, from his age, can know little of any figures of speech, and will commonly adopt the literal interpretation; thus, what was never meant to be seriously understood may exert all the force of precept or instruction. In this way may indiscreet conversation, to which they who carry it on attach no importance, and which they never dream of any one's taking as expressing their actual thoughts and feelings, be received by young minds with all the reverence which they are taught to render unto truth. Disciplined to respect their superiors, and, therefore, to attach credit to their words—instructed to obey them implicitly, and, therefore, to consult their very wishes, it can hardly fail but that what is uttered in their presence will pass for true, and what is desired appear worth being sought. And probably children often imbibe opinions, which form the foundation of character, from casual expressions dropped in their hearing, and which, had explanation been asked, they would have found to have been spoken without thought and

almost without meaning. Who shall tell us the effect of a joke upon sacred things, the levity of which may have been pardoned by elder persons for the sake of the wit, but the irreverence of which may sink deep into younger, and work a half persuasion that the Bible, after all, is not that awful volume with which it were sacrilege to trifle? Who shall tell us what is done by discourse on the advantageousness of wealth, and by hasty wishes, perhaps thoughtlessly uttered, for larger measure of earthly possessions? The seeds of covetousness may have been sown in the young hearer, when the speaker himself has been indifferent to money; and the child of a parent, who is actually content with a little, may grow up with a passion for much, from having overheard the parent talk as though he desired a far ampler fortune.

You may tell us that we assign causes disproportionate to effects: as well tell us that the oak cannot spring from the acorn. Life is made up of little things; and human character, traced to its beginning, will be found issuing from drops rather than from fountains. You ought, therefore, when speaking before those whom you instruct to respect and obey you, to speak on the supposition that all which you assert will be received as true, all for which you wish be accounted desirable. You must not think aloud, if you do not mean your thoughts to pass for verities or have the weight of commands. If such a rule be neglected, you must not be surprised if they who hear you enter

upon paths which you never meant them to tread, and afterwards plead your authority in excuse. There may again occur precisely what occurred with David and his servants. It is not that the monarch has commanded his warriors to dare death, that they may fetch him water from a favourite spring. It is not that he has even wished them to undertake the rash and perilous enterprise. It is only, that, without reflection or thought, he gave utterance to something that was passing in his mind, and that those about him overheard the inconsiderate expression. And do you mark that young person, who is devoting himself with uncalculating eagerness to some worldly pursuit, as though he had been trained to nothing but the acquisition of honour or wealth? Is it that the parent literally instructed him to rush through all danger that he might but grasp the coveted thing? Is it that he was told, in so many words, to give energy, and talent, and time, to the obtaining a perishable good, so that he can urge the precept of a father, whom he loved and revered, as justifying a career in which the object is worthless, if compared with the risk and the toil? Probably not so. The parent never wished him thus to squander his powers; the parent never thought that he would; but that parent, having gained his affections, and secured his attention to his commands and his wishes, was little careful as to what he let fall in his hearing; he was apt to say what he did not mean, to give words to feelings which he would never have breathed, had he

remembered the possibility of their being received as genuine, or interpreted as laudable: in short, like David, when nothing was further from his wish than that his wish should be acted on, he was used to utter exclamations such as this, "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate."

But this only sets before you what appears blame-worthy in the conduct of David: we have yet to consider what there may be to deserve praise or imitation. And this is to be sought in what he did when his followers returned, and placed before him the water for which he had inconsiderately longed. It would not have been strange, or unnatural, had he argued that, though he had done wrong in expressing the wish, it could not be unlawful to use the means of gratifying that wish so unexpectedly provided. He might have said, I would not indeed have exposed the lives of my brave soldiers, in order to obtain this refreshment; but now that, unbidden, and from the warmth of their attachment, they have cut their way to the well, and brought me of its flowings, I may surely quench my thirst, and thus afford them the best reward for their zeal in my service.

But David argued differently, in a manner that showed more of high principle, and strong fear of God. He felt that there was a contradiction, in owning an action wrong, and allowing himself to be advantaged by that action. The least which he could do, in proof of his consciousness of error, was

to refuse to appropriate what that error had procured. He must punish himself, by an act of self-denial, for a want of self-command, and show that, if he had been betrayed into expressing a rash wish, he had at least discovered, and repented of, the rashness. And therefore he would not taste the coveted draught, but made it a kind of offering to the Lord, pouring it on the ground, in witness that he had sinned, and that, having sinned, he needed an expiatory ablution.

It is not the heroism of David, in acting thus, which we propose for admiration and imitation, though it may be, as we stated in an earlier part of our discourse, that the monarch, parched with thirst, and yet refusing to touch the water which sparkled so invitingly before him, would form as fine a picture as human story can give of forbearance and greatness. But it is the genuineness of the repentance of David on which we would insist, the sincerity of his piety as proved by his refusal to derive benefit from his sin. We think that herein is he specially an example to ourselves, and that the cases are far from uncommon, in which there is such similarity of circumstance, as to render the example most direct and appropriate.

It is not for a moment to be questioned that a present advantage is often the immediate result of what is wrong, so that, in one way or another, the sin produces what the sinner desires to obtain. If it were not so, if the consequences of doing wrong were

never, nay, if they were not frequently, profitable to the individual who does the wrong thing, we hardly know where, in most instances, temptation would lie, or where would be the exercise of virtue. In general, it is a balance between the present and the future which we are required to strike: the great task to which we are summoned, is the not allowing ourselves to be overborne by immediate results, so as to keep more distant out of sight, but the calculating what will be for our profit on the whole, visible things and invisible being alike brought into account. And, of course, whilst such is our condition, or such the system of probation beneath which we live, a sort of temporary reward must often be attainable by the sinner: there must be something of advantage to be procured through want of principle, and lost through rigid conscientiousness. Such cases will often occur in the stir and jostle of a mercantile community, where vast interests become so involved, and immense revenues so depend on the turn of a single speculation, that the least underhand dealing might at times fill a man's coffers, and almost a dishonest thought transform him from the poor to the wealthy.

And we are now concerned with the question, as to what is binding on a man, if, with the advantages, procured by a fault, lying at his disposal, the water from the well of Bethlehem sparkling before him, he become convinced of his fault, aware that he has done wrong, or not acted with the honour and in-

tegrity which he was bound to have maintained. Is he to drink of the water, to enjoy the advantages? Ah, it may be often a hard question: but we do not see how there can be any true penitence, where what has been wrongfully obtained is kept and used, as though it had been the produce of equitable dealing. If a man have grown rich by dishonesty, he ought, we believe, to become poor through repentance. We cannot think it enough, if an individual, who has not made his money in the most clean-handed way, and who feels compunction in consequence, give large sums in charity, as an atonement, or reparation for his fault. If he only give what he can conveniently spare, or even if his charities somewhat press on his resources, he certainly does nothing but what, on high Christian principle, he would be bound equally to do, had his property accumulated in the most honourable modes. And it cannot be sufficient to make that use of money unjustly acquired, which a man of strong piety would make of the produce of integrity and industry, and thus, over and above the concealment of having been dishonest, to acquire the reputation of being benevolent.

We should, therefore, be disposed to give the conduct of David as furnishing an example for those, who, conscious of a fault, are so situated as to be able to reap advantage from that fault. Let the case be that at which we have just hinted, as not unlikely to occur amid the complicated interests of a great mercantile community. Let us suppose an

opportunity, presented to a trader, of making large profits, if he will but deviate, in some trifling particular, from what is strictly and undoubtedly upright. The fault to be committed may hardly be greater than that committed by David, who did nothing but thoughtlessly give utterance to a wish which ought not to have been entertained, or at least not expressed. It may just depend on the keeping back of some piece of information which the trader is not compelled to divulge, and which others, if equally on the alert, and equally shrewd, might perhaps have equally obtained, whether a certain article shall fetch a certain price, or be suddenly and greatly depreciated. The trader does nothing but hold his tongue, as David did nothing but give it too much license, and a large profit in consequence lies at his disposal. But now a feeling is wrought in the trader's mind, that it was not the act of a conscientious and high-principled man, to take advantage of the ignorance of others, and thus entangle them in a bargain which they would not have made, with his reasons for expecting the sudden fall in the market. And as he debates what ought to be done with property so dubiously acquired, his first resolution will probably be to use it well and religiously: at least, he will say, it increases my power of benefiting others, and promoting religious objects; and I may lawfully retain it, intending that it shall be thus employed. But this is, to the very letter, what David would have done, had he resolved to drink the

water, arguing that it would refresh and invigorate him, and thus enable him to fight with greater strength the battle of the Lord. But God will have no offering on which there is a stain. Money, soiled by the mode of acquisition, is hardly to be sanctified by the mode of employment. When Zaccheus stood before Christ, and described what he did with his property, he spake of giving half his goods to the poor; but, mark, he did not reckon amongst those goods what he might have acquired through underhand dealing—such portion, if such there were, was not his to retain or distribute at pleasure: “If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” There was an accurate distinction made by this publican, now that he had been brought to a correct state of mind, between restitution and almsgiving: he would give alms of that only which had been honourably obtained; the rest he returned, with large interest, to those from whom it had been unfairly procured.

And though it might be impossible for the trader, in the case just supposed, to make restitution precisely to the parties who have been injured through his successful speculations, we do not see how, with his conscience accusing him of having done wrong, he can lawfully appropriate any share of the profits, any more than David might have lawfully drunk of the water procured at his ill-advised wish. It may not be possible to make restitution; for so interwoven are various interests, and so many are the

contrivances for shifting off losses from ourselves, and making them fall upon others, that it is often hard to say where the pressure really rests ; and it is among the most melancholy of facts, that the rich speculator, who seems only to sweep up the gains of men of large means like himself, would often be found, if you could trace the effects of his speculations through their multifold spreadings, to have compassed unwittingly the ruin of a hundred petty dealers, and wrung away the scanty pittance of orphans and widows. But if there may not be restitution, because the exact objects injured are not to be ascertained, we do not, nevertheless, understand why there should be appropriation. The king of Israel held the helmet in his hands, and looked upon the water as it sparkled in that war-cup. Was he tempted by the freshness and clearness of the coveted draught, now that he felt how wrong he had been in breathing the wish ? Oh, no ! it looked to him like blood : it came not from the well of Bethlehem, but from the veins of his soldiers : shall he drink, so to speak, of the very life of another ? he shrinks from the thought, and will do nothing with the water but pour it out to God.

And the trader stands, with the profits of his scarcely honourable speculation glittering before him. Shall he invest them for his own use ? shall he take possession of them for himself and his family ? Oh, they may have been coined out of the losses, the distresses, the sufferings of numerous households ;

they may as well seem to him dimmed with tears, as the water seemed to David polluted with blood; and we would have him, if his repentance be sincere, and he desire to prove that sincerity, imitate the monarch in refusing to appropriate the least portion, in pouring out the whole as an offering to the Lord; and in exclaiming, when tempted to profit by the sin for which he professes to be sorry, "Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this."

Now we have thus endeavoured to give a practical character to a narrative of Scripture, which it is easy to read without supposing it to convey any personal lessons. Probably some of you, on the announcement of our subject, expected us to treat it as a typical history: for the mention of the well of Bethlehem, and the longing for its water, might immediately suggest that Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judah, and that He offers to each of us, what, in his own words, "shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." But it may be doubtful whether we have, in this instance, sufficient authority for regarding the registered occurrences as symbolical; at all events, we should never spiritualize any narrative of facts, till the facts have been carefully examined as facts, and the lessons extracted which their record may have been designed to convey.

But whilst we should hesitate to found any doctrinal statement on the narrative before us, considered as typical, we know not why, having strictly

confined ourselves to the plainest and most practical view of the passage, we may not now, in conclusion, survey the occurrences with an eye that looks for Christ and the Gospel, in the persons and events of earlier dispensations. There may be truth in the supposition, which some have advanced, that David had only a spiritual meaning in the wish to which he gave utterance. It is possible; and, if so, the whole transaction may have had that significative character which belongs to much of the history of early days, and which turned occurrences into parables, through which God instructed his faithful servants. David, partially informed as to the scheme of redemption, and knowing that he himself was, in many points, set to prefigure the Messiah, must often have longed for fuller disclosures, and striven to give shape and consistency to dim, mysterious images, which passed to and fro in his visions as a prophet. He would associate Bethlehem, his own birth-place, with the birth-place of the Deliverer of whom he was a type; and look naturally on the trees and waters of that village, as obtaining a holy, a symbolical character from the illustrious Being who would arise there in "the fulness of time." It might then have been a wish for greater knowledge of redemption, which was uppermost in the monarch's mind, when he longed for water from the well of Bethlehem. How natural, that, harassed as he was with temporal troubles, he should desire spiritual consolations, and that he should

pray for the refreshments which were eventually to gush forth, as he well knew, from Bethlehem.

And may there not have been conveyed to him, through what then took place, intimations in regard of the deliverance of the world? Certainly, it were not difficult to give a parabolic character to the occurrences, and to imagine them ordered with a view to David's instruction. If water is to be fetched from the well of Bethlehem, it must be with the discomfiture of a vast host of foes: three unite in the purpose, and overbear all opponents. And if "living water" is to be brought to those who lie parched on the moral desert of the earth, indeed it can only be with the defeat of mightier than the Philistines: principality and power withstand the endeavour: who shall prevail in so great an enterprise? Three must combine: it is not a work for any one person, even though divine; but three shall unite, to strike down the adversaries, and bring the draught of life to the perishing: and if the cup come apparently in the hand of but one of the three, the other two shall have been equally instrumental in procuring the blessing.

Thus far there is so much analogy as would seem to make it not improbable, that the transaction was designed to be significative or symbolical. But does the analogy end here? We would not carry it too far; and yet we can believe that a still deeper lesson was opened up to David. Did he long for water from

the well of Bethlehem? did he think that it was only water, something merely to refresh the parched lip of the pilgrim, which was to flow from the surety of a world that iniquity had ruined? It may have been so: it may have been that he was yet but imperfectly taught in the mysterious truths of propitiation and redemption. What then? he receives what he had longed for, what had been drawn from the well of Bethlehem; but it seems to him not water, it seems to him blood, the blood of one of those who had braved so much for his refreshment. May he not have learned something from this as to the nature of the interposition which the Redeemer would make? May he not have gathered that the fountain to be opened, for the cleansing and refreshing of the world, would be a fountain of blood?

“My blood is drink indeed”—these words, uttered years after by the Redeemer Himself, may have been virtually syllabled to the Psalmist, through his being forced to regard as blood the water from the well of Bethlehem, that well to which he looked as typifying, in some way, the person or office of Christ. And then there is a high solemnity in his pouring out the water unto the Lord. It was the blood of the costliest sacrifice, and must all be presented as an expiatory offering.

We know not whether David were thus instructed or not; whether the transaction were designed to be significative, nor whether, if it were, the symbols were explained. But certainly the occurrences are

such as might be woven into a kind of parable of redemption ; and it is always pleasing to find figures and shadows which correspond to Christian truths, even where we have no express warrant for asserting the resemblance. Blessed be God, we need not long in vain for water from the well of Bethlehem. The hosts of the mighty have been broken through ; a stronger than the strong has unlocked for us the flowings of the river of life : but oh, if we would take of the stream, and live for ever, we must acknowledge it as the blood of Him, who went on our behalf against “principalities and powers,” and who, finding the springs of human happiness dried, filled them from his own veins, and they gushed with immortality.

S E R M O N V I I I .

THE THIRST OF CHRIST.

JOHN XIX. 28.

“ After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.”

IF an impostor were to arise, desirous of passing himself off as some personage whom prophets had foretold, he would naturally take the recorded predictions, and endeavour to make the facts of his history agree with their announcements. It would evidently be useless for him to pretend to the being the predicted individual, unless he could point out at least an apparent correspondence between what he was, and what he did, and the character and conduct which prophecy had delineated. There would, of course, be an immediate reference to the ancient writings, an immediate comparison of their foretellings with what was now given as their accomplish-

ment; and if the two did not agree, the pretender would be instantly scouted, and no one could for a moment be deceived by his pretensions.

Hence, the great endeavour of the supposed impostor would certainly be to extract from prophecy a full account of the actions and fortunes of the individual for whom he wished to be taken, and then, as nearly as possible, to make those actions and fortunes his own. Suppose, for example, that an impostor had desired to pass himself off as the Messiah, the deliverer, and ruler, so long and anxiously expected by the Jews. He would necessarily have been aware that the national expectation rested on certain ancient prophecies, and that all which could be known beforehand of the Christ was contained in certain books received as inspired. It is not, therefore, to be imagined that he would fail to be a student of prophecy, or to take its descriptions as sketches in which he must exhibit delineations of himself. But, supposing him to have done this, could he have made much way in establishing a correspondence between himself and the subject of prophecy? It is easy, undoubtedly, to find, or fancy, predictions of which a man might contrive an apparent fulfilment in respect of himself. They might be predictions of certain things that should be done, and these, or very similar, the man might be able to perform. They might be predictions of certain things that should be suffered; and these, or very similar, the man might endure. But could the individual, whom

we have supposed setting up for the Messiah, have managed to effect a conformity between his actions, and sufferings, and those predicted of our Lord? It is allowed on all hands, that the history of Christ, as related in the Gospels, corresponds, with great accuracy, to what prophets had foretold of the Messiah. But is the correspondence such as an ingenious impostor, having the prophecies in his hands, and studying to produce their apparent accomplishment, could have possibly effected? This is a question well worth the being asked, though the answer is so easy that you may all give it for yourselves.

There are a few respects in which an impostor might have contrived the fulfilment of prophecy. But most of the predictions referring to Christ are of things over which the individual could have no control; predictions, for example, as to the place and circumstances of his birth, as to the treatment which he should meet with, and the death which he should die. They are predictions which were not to be fulfilled by the actions of the party himself, but by the actions of others; and we need not say how little power the individual could have of making others so act as seemingly to accomplish prophecy, however bent he might be on the apparently fulfilling it himself. And it ought to be further observed, that if an impostor had endeavoured, in the time of our Lord, to pass himself off as the predicted Messiah, and, accordingly, had attempted to effect a correspondence between his own history and prophecy,

he would never have made himself “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” He would have taken the national expectation as the just interpretation of prophecy, and never have thought of making good his pretensions by affecting a resemblance between himself and delineations which those around him either denied or disliked. His pattern would unquestionably have been the Messiah, not as described by seers of old, but rather as described in the popular explanations of their visions: and we need not tell you that such a Messiah was not presented in the person of our Lord and Master Christ.

Thus there is nothing easier than the showing that the correspondence which may be traced between Jesus of Nazareth, and a mysterious personage of whom ancient prophecy makes frequent mention, is such as could not have been produced by any impostor, however artful or powerful. Even had prophecy been far clearer, and more explicit than it was; had it not required, in many particulars which now seem quite plain, the being accomplished in order to the being thoroughly understood; we may fearlessly declare that no pretender, taking it as his guide, and labouring to make his life its illustration, could have succeeded in effecting, even in appearance, the thousandth part of those numerous, striking, and frequently minute fulfilments, which are to be traced in the actions and endurances of Him whom we honour as the King of Israel, the Anointed of God.

But why have we gone into these remarks on a point which, perhaps, may never have occurred to any of our hearers? for, probably, none of you ever entertained a suspicion that Christ might have contrived those fulfilments of prophecy on which so much stress is laid. Our reason is easily given. We have in our text the record of a thing done by Christ, with the view, or for the purpose, of accomplishing an ancient prediction. The course pursued is precisely that which, according to our foregoing statements, an impostor might have been expected to take. The party claiming to be the Messiah remembers a certain prophecy which has not yet been fulfilled, and forthwith sets himself to procure its fulfilment. It is, you see, expressly stated that Jesus said, "I thirst," in order that He might bring round the accomplishment of a passage of Scripture. And had this been the solitary instance in which prophecy found itself fulfilled in the history of Jesus, or had other fulfilments been of the same kind, such, that is, as might possibly have been contrived or planned, we admit that the argument from prophecy would have been of little worth in establishing the Messiahship of our Lord. But we have already sufficiently shown you that no such explanation can be given of the correspondences between history and prophecy in the case of the Redeemer; forasmuch as many of them were such as it was not in the power of any pretender to have produced, and many more would have been avoided, rather than at-

tempted, by the shrewdest deceiver. And this having been determined, we may allow that Christ occasionally acted with the express design of fulfilling predictions which had reference to Himself; that He shaped his conduct, and ordered his sayings, with a view to agreement with what prophets had foretold. We may admit this, without any misgivings that we perhaps weaken the argument from prophecy, seeing that, whilst what we admit is of very rare occurrence, it cannot bring suspicion upon evidence derived from the general character of predictions, and their accomplishment.

And it is worth your observing, that, even in the case before us, though unquestionably Christ complained of thirst, for the purpose of fulfilling a prophecy, it was not in man's power to insure the fulfilment. His mere complaining of the thirst accomplished no prediction. The prediction, as we shall presently see, required that when the Messiah was thirsty there should be given Him vinegar to drink. Had our Lord asked for vinegar, and had vinegar been brought Him, there might have been some ground for saying that He actually made the accomplishment of a prophecy. But when He only complained of thirst, and when, in answer to his complaint, not merely was a sponge put to his mouth, but a sponge full of vinegar, you may see that there were circumstances, and contingencies, which could hardly have been provided for except by Divine foresight; so that, although indeed Christ made his complaint,

“that the Scripture might be fulfilled,” there is little probability that the Scripture would have been fulfilled, had He not been in truth the Son of the living God. You may say that Christ saw “the vessel full of vinegar,” and that He might fairly have calculated that a complaint of thirst would be met by the offer of vinegar. But, at least, He could not have arranged that the vinegar should be the nearest drink at hand, even if it were at hand; for “one of them *ran*, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar;” and thus, put the case how you will, the accomplishment of the prophecy hardly came within human contrivance. Or you may say, that, as vinegar was commonly used by the Roman soldiers, the almost certainty was that vinegar would be offered: but it appears that only one person was willing to attend to Christ’s complaint, “the rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.” How far, then, was the accomplishment from having been necessarily in the power of a deceiver!

We may, however, consider that enough has now been said on an objection which might be raised against a fulfilment of prophecy, because there was an evident acting with a view to that fulfilment. We would pass to more interesting statements, which may be grounded on the very simple, but affecting incident, which is recorded in our text. We hardly know whether, in the whole narrative of the Mediator’s sufferings, there is a verse so full of material

for profitable meditation. We shall not attempt to parcel out this material under any set divisions, but rather leave ourselves free to follow such trains of thought as may successively present themselves. We shall only assign it, as the general object of the remainder of our discourse, to examine the truths and inferences derivable from the facts, that, just before He expired, Christ exclaimed, "I thirst," and that He uttered the exclamation in order "that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

Now we think it well deserving your notice, that it should have been for the sake of accomplishing prophecy, and not for that of assuaging his pains, that our Lord, in his last moments, complained of thirst. It seems implied in the concise statement of the Evangelist, that, had He not remembered a prediction which was yet unfulfilled, Christ would have been silent, though He might have used of Himself the touching words of the Psalmist, "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws." Intolerable must have been his thirst as He hung between Heaven and earth; yet He would never, as it seems, have mentioned that thirst, nor asked a single drop of moisture, had He not thought it necessary to the complete proof of his mission. You know that this is the solitary exclamation which He uttered expressive of bodily suffering. He is not reported to have said anything when the crown of thorns was fastened round his forehead. There is no recorded cry, or groan, when the nails were driven

into his hands and feet, or when the cross was set upright, though the pain must have been acute, almost beyond thought. He endured all this, not only without a murmur, but without even a manifestation, or indication, of his agony; so that never was there the martyr who bore with greater fortitude the torments of a lingering and excruciating death.

His other sufferings, however, scarcely admitted of alleviation; there was nothing to be done but submit, and wait patiently for death. Though even in regard of these He seems to have declined the ordinary modes of mitigation, for He refused the "wine mingled with myrrh," which was tendered Him just before his crucifixion, and which, by partially stupefying the victim, might have diminished the torture. He had a great work to perform on the cross, and he would not deaden his faculties, ere He ascended that terrible altar.

But thirst might have been relieved—thirst, which must have been one of the most distressing consequences of crucifixion—and it would have been natural that He should have asked of the bystanders a few drops of water. And He did mention his thirst, but not for the sake of moistening the parched tongue and throat—only to afford occasion for another proof of his being the Messiah. It is as though He had no thought to give to his sufferings, but, even in the moment of terrible extremity, were intent upon nothing but the great work which He had undertaken for men. We may even venture to think that not

only was it not for the sake of mitigating his sufferings that He complained of thirst; but that it was an increase of those sufferings to have to make the complaint. The multitude, which stood round, were disposed to treat Him with derision; they were watching him, maliciously and scornfully, that they might triumph in his anguish. You may judge how eager they were to show contempt and hatred of the sufferer, from what we have already referred to, as having occurred on his utterance of the piteous cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The insulting shout immediately arose, "This man calleth for Elias"—so ready were they to make Him the subject of ridicule, and so on the watch for proof that they had succeeded in driving the iron into his soul.

But hitherto He had, as it were, almost baffled and disappointed them: He had betrayed little or no emotion; but, by his apparent superiority to bodily torture, had denied them all occasion for fierce exultation. And it quite consists with what we know of the innocent but sensitive sufferer, that we should suppose it a new trial to Him to have to confess what He felt, and thus to expose Himself to the revilings of his inveterate enemies. There had been hitherto such a majesty in his anguish, such an awful and dignified defiance of torture, as must almost have made the executioner crouch before the victim. And now must He, as it were, yield? Must He, by an acknowledgment of suffering, gratify a

savage crowd, and pierce the few fond and faithful hearts which were to be found at the foot of the cross? His mother was within hearing; at her side was the disciple whom He loved; they were already wounded to the quick—shall He lacerate them yet more by speaking of his wretchedness?

But the Scripture must be fulfilled. There was yet a particular in which prophecy had to be accomplished; and every other feeling gave way to that of the necessity of completing the proof of his being the Messiah. It was the last, and one of the most touching, of the evidences of his love. It was only his love for us which made Him speak of his thirst. He would not leave the smallest room for doubt that He was indeed the promised Redeemer: He loved us too well not to provide against every possible suspicion; and therefore, though He would never have complained for the sake of obtaining any assuagement of the pain; though He would have desired to avoid complaining, that He might not provoke fresh insult from the multitude; though He would have kept silence, if only that He might not add to the grief of the few who tenderly loved Him; yet, rather than allow the least particle to be wanting in the evidence whereby we might know Him as the Christ, He gave all but his last words to an expression of distress.

Oh, we know of nothing which more shows the ardency of the Saviour's love for the Church, than this confession of thirst just before He expired. We

look on Him with admiration, as He stands unmoved before Pilate, and returns no answer to the vehement accusations poured forth by his countrymen. "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." We behold Him scourged, and buffeted, and crowned with thorns, and nailed to the accursed tree—and we are amazed, yea, confounded, by his patience; for not the least cry is wrung from Him in his anguish. Is it that He does not feel acutely? Is it that his humanity is not sensitive to pain? Ah, not so. He is, all the while, tortured by an excruciating thirst, which is at once the evidence and the accompaniment of racking pangs. But He has to set an example of endurance; He is moreover occupied with thoughts and hopes of the world's deliverance; and, therefore, by a mighty effort, He keeps down the struggling sorrow, and restrains every token of agony.

This then is in love to us; his silence is in love to us. But it might have accorded best with the feelings of so lofty a Being, thus to baffle his adversaries, by refusing to let them see Him writhe beneath their merciless inflictions—does He love us so well that He will even yield to those adversaries, and confess Himself vanquished, if it might be for our good? Yea, even this He will do; for remembering, as He hangs upon the cross, a prediction which has yet to be fulfilled, He forgets all in his desire to provide for our conviction, and breaks into the cry, "I thirst,"

in order only that the Scripture might be accomplished.

But we have stated that the prediction, which our Lord had in mind, was not one of great prominence, not one perhaps whose fulfilment would appear to us of much moment. We may suppose it to have been to words in the sixty-ninth Psalm that Christ mentally referred: "They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." There is no other express prophecy whose accomplishment He can be thought to have contemplated; and we may venture to say, that, if this had not been literally fulfilled in respect of our Lord, we should hardly have urged it as an objection against his pretensions. Accustomed to regard the Psalms as spoken primarily in the person of David, we do not expect, even when they are undoubtedly prophetic, to find every line verified in the history of that Messiah of whom David was the type. We experience no surprise, if, in a psalm, the quotations from which in the New Testament prove that it speaks of the Christ, we meet with verses which we cannot distinctly show to be applicable to our Lord. Suppose then that Christ had died without complaining of thirst, and without receiving the vinegar—we should perhaps scarcely have said that there was a prediction which had never been accomplished. We should either have supposed that the verse in question belonged in some way to David, or we should have given it, as we easily might, a figurative

sense, and then have sought its fulfilment in the indignities and cruelties of which Christ was the subject.

And this shows you what a very minute particular it was in the predictions of Himself, which caused our Lord to break silence, and utter an expression of suffering. It was a particular which we should probably have overlooked, or of which, at least, we should never have reckoned the literal accomplishment indispensable to the completeness of the prophetic evidence for Christ. Yet, so anxious, so determined was the Redeemer to leave us no possible excuse for rejecting Him as the anointed of God, that, not satisfied with having fulfilled all but this inconsiderable particular, and though to fulfil it must cost Him, as we have shown you, a very painful effort, He would not breathe out his soul till He had tasted the vinegar. This was indeed a manifestation of his love: but there are other truths, besides that of the Saviour's solicitude for our good, to be drawn from his determination that the least prophecy should not go unaccomplished.

You will observe that it is affirmed in the text, that Jesus knew that all things were now accomplished; and that, knowing this, He proceeded to speak of his thirst, with a view to the fulfilment of yet one more prediction. Of course there were many things which had not been accomplished, many whose accomplishment was still necessarily future, having respect to the burial, resurrection, ascension, and tri-

umph of Christ. But Jesus knew that every thing was accomplished, which had to be accomplished before his actual death, except the receiving the vinegar. He knew that there remained nothing but that the words, "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink," should be fulfilled in his person, and He might resign his soul into the hands of the Father, convinced that every prophecy which bore reference to the life or death of the Messiah, had received its completion, and would be a witness for Him to all after ages. You must admit that the text represents Jesus as knowing that there was but one word of prophecy which had not yet been accomplished, and that, too, a prophecy of so inconsiderable a particular, that we should scarcely have detected the want, had our Lord died without bringing it to pass.

This is a most surprising testimony to the completion of prophecy: it is a bold challenge to the infidel who would dispute the claims of Him who hung upon the cross. By taking an apparently unimportant prediction, and dealing with it as the only prediction, whether in type or in word, which had not yet been fulfilled, Jesus may be said to have staked his Messiahship on every single prophecy—"Find one, a solitary one, which I have not accomplished, and I resign all pretension to the being God's Son." And when you come to think of the multitude of predictions which have respect to the life and death of the Messiah, and of the almost countless mystical rites, which, equally with the

visions of seers, shadowed the "One Mediator between God and man," you can hardly fail to be amazed at the assertion, that Jesus knew that "all things were now accomplished." Yet, believing Him to have been divine, we know Him to have been omniscient; and, therefore, we are emboldened so to state the argument from prophecy, as to be ready to give up all, if you can find a single flaw. The writings of "holy men of old" teem with notices of that Being whom God had promised to send in "the fulness of time." Some of these notices relate to important, others to apparently trivial particulars. The line of which He was to spring, the power by which He should be conceived, the place in which He should be born, the dangers which should threaten his childhood, the miracles which He should work in his manhood, the treatment which He should receive, the malice of his enemies, the desertion of his friends, the price at which He should be sold, the dividing of his garments, the death which He should die—all these are stated with the precision and minuteness of history; as though prophets had been biographers, and, not content with general outlines, had been instructed to furnish records of daily actions and occurrences. And over and above predictions so comprehensive, yet so abounding in detail, there are figurative rites which all had respect to the same illustrious person; a thousand types foreshow his office, a thousand emblems represent his deeds and his sufferings.

And we are not satisfied with saying, that, in every striking and prominent particular, a correspondence may be traced between the Christ whose history we have in the Gospels, and the Christ whom we find in the strains of prophets, and the institutions of the law. We do not ask you to admit that it must have been of Jesus of Nazareth that the Old Testament spake, and that the temple services were full, because there are certain main features of that person in the descriptions of inspired writers, and the shadows of ceremonial observances. Our position is, that there is not a single line in prophecy, which can be shown to refer to the life and death of the Messiah, which was not accomplished in Jesus; not a single type in the law, to which He was not an antitype. You are at liberty to take any prediction, you are at liberty to take any shadow; and we are ready to rest the cause of Christianity on that prediction's having been fulfilled in Jesus, or on his having been the substance of that shadow. Neither is this the challenge of a rash and boastful theology. This is the criterion which the Founder of our religion Himself may be said to have appointed, and that, too, at the very moment when He was finishing our redemption. And we know not how to convey to you our idea of the wonderfulness of the fact, that Christ could feel, after He had hung for hours upon the cross, that, if a few drops of vinegar were given Him by a bystander, every jot and tittle would be accomplished of all that had been foretold of the

Messiah, up to the time of his death, from the first prophecy to Adam to the last words of Malachi. But it is unquestionable, from our text, that such was his feeling: upon this feeling we may safely ground our challenge; rather, we may consider it as the challenge of the Redeemer Himself to the unbelieving of every generation.

It seems to us as though the Saviour, whilst suspended between earth and heaven, had summoned before Him every prophet and seer whom God had raised up in successive ages of the world, and had required each, as he passed in review, to give in his claims on the predicted Messiah. No marvel that He almost forgot his intense sufferings whilst engaged in so sublime and momentous an inquiry, whilst communing with patriarchs and priests, and the long train of heralds who had seen his day afar off, and kept expectation alive amongst men. And Abraham recounts to Him all the particulars of the sacrifice of his son: Jacob reminds Him of the departure of the sceptre from Judah: Moses speaks of the resemblance which must be borne to himself: Aaron, in his sacerdotal vestments, crowds the scene with mystic figures. Then arise the later prophets. They speak of his virgin mother; of his divine parentage, and yet of his descent from David. Isaiah produces his numerous, and almost historic, delineations: Daniel reckons up his seventy weeks: Micah fixes the nativity to Bethlehem Ephratah: Zechariah weighs the thirty pieces of silver, and introduces her

king to Jerusalem, "riding upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass:" Malachi revives Elias, and sends him as a messenger to "prepare the way of the Lord." And David, as though his harp had been fresh strung, pours forth again his touching melodies, repeating the piteous complaints which, mingled at times with notes of triumph, he had been instructed to utter in his typical character.

But one after another of these ancient worthies passes from before the Mediator, leaving Him assured that there is not the line in his prophetic scroll which has not been accomplished. And that Mediator is just about to commend his soul into the hands of the Father, satisfied of there being no defect in the evidence from prophecy, when one saying of the royal psalmist strikes Him as not yet literally verified, and He defers death a moment longer, that this too, though seemingly of little moment, may hold good of himself. Yes, champions of infidelity, disprove it if you can, and if you cannot, explain, if you can, on your own principles, how the almost countless lines of prophecy came to meet in one person, and that one Jesus whom you refuse to adore. Yes, followers of the Saviour, search deeply into the fact, and after searching, fail, if you can, to triumph in the having as your leader one who fulfilled to the letter, in the short space of a life, whatsoever voices and visions from on high had assigned, through many centuries, to the seed of the woman. True it is, gloriously,

incontestably true, that Jesus had only, just before He died, to exclaim "I thirst," and to receive, in answer to his complaint, a few drops of vinegar on a sponge, and He could then breathe out his spirit, amid the confessions of patriarchs, and prophets, and priests, and kings, each testifying, with a voice of wonder and of worship, that "all things," without a solitary exception, that "all things were now accomplished."

But our text throws light on another doctrine, or fact which, if often presented to your attention, is of so great importance as to deserve the being frequently stated. We are now about to refer to the power which Christ had over his life, a power which caused his death to differ altogether from that of an ordinary man. We wish you to observe the surprising composedness which is indicated by the words on which we now discourse. They seem to represent Christ, according to our foregoing statement, as actually examining all the records of prophecy, that He might determine whether there yet remained any thing to be done before the soul could be dismissed from the body. They give us the idea of a being, who, in full possession of every faculty, is engaged in investigating ancient documents, rather than of one, who, exhausted by protracted sufferings, is on the point of dissolution. How wonderful that the recollection should be so clear! that the almost expiring man should be able, amid the throes of death, to fix

on a single, inconsiderable prediction, to decide that there was no other, out of an immense assemblage, which had yet to be accomplished, and to take measures for its being accomplished before He breathed his last! What collectedness, what superiority to suffering, yea, what command over death!

For it is evident—and this is the most remarkable thing—that Jesus determined that He would live until the prediction were fulfilled, and that He would die so soon as it were. The Evangelist tells us, “When Jesus, therefore, had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” He waited till the vinegar had been given Him, till, that is, the only unaccomplished prophecy had been accomplished, and then immediately, as though it were quite optional with Him at what moment He would die, “gave up the ghost.” This is amazing; this is unlike death, though it was actually the separation of body and soul; for where is the necessity of nature? where the ebbing away of strength? where the gradual wearing out of the principle of life? Christ evidently died just when He chose to die, and only because He chose to die: He had the spirit in his own keeping, and could retain or dismiss it as He pleased. You find that Pilate and others wondered at finding Him so soon dead; He died sooner than a crucified person could have been expected to die: and herein too He had reference to prophecy, for had He lingered the ordinary, or natural period, his legs would have been broken, as were

those of the malefactors executed with Him; whereas there was a typical prediction, in the paschal lamb, that not a bone of Him should be broken.

So that, with Christ, to die was strictly a voluntary act—"I lay down my life: no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again"—it was an act of which He could fix the precise moment, which He could hasten or delay at his own pleasure, which no pain, no disease, no decay could effect, but which was wrought, altogether and at once, by his will. Death was not with Him what it will be with one of us. We shall die through necessity, with no power over the soul, whether of retaining or dismissing; exhausted by sickness, or broken up by accident, unable to make the pulse beat one more or one less than shall be ordained by a Being who is immeasurably beyond our control. But what resemblance is there between this and the death of Jesus Christ on the cross? Though dying what would be ordinarily a lingering death,—dying, to use a common expression, by inches, and therefore certain to be, at the least, exhausted and spent—we find Him, in the few moments preceding dissolution, with every power in full play, the mind all in action for the accomplishing his mission, and keeping, as it were, the vital principle under its orders, ready to be suspended so soon as prophecies were fulfilled.

Call ye this death? Yes, men and brethren, this was really death: He who hung upon the cross died

as actually as any one of us will die ; for death is the separation of the soul from the body ; and the soul of Christ went into the separate state, whilst his body was consigned to the grave. But call ye this the death of a mere man ? can ye account for the peculiarities of Christ's death, except by supposing Him the Lord of life and glory ? Martyrs, ye died bravely, and beautifully ; but ye died not thus. Saints of God, ye went wondrously through the last struggle ; but ye went not thus. Oh, it is a noble thing, that we can go to the scene of crucifixion, and there, in spite of all the ignominy and suffering, discover in the dying man the incarnate God. The Jew and the Greek may taunt us with the shame of the cross ; we glory in that cross : at no moment of his course has the Deity shone more brightly through the humanity of the Mediator : not when his voice was heard in the grave, and the buried returned to the living, did He more conspicuously show divine power over death, than in the releasing, when He would, his own soul from the body. Come with us and gaze on this mysterious person dying, "the just for the unjust." Seems He to you to be dying as an ordinary man ? Can ye find no difference between Him and those crucified, the one on his right hand, and the other on his left ? Nay, in them you have all the evidence that life is being drained out drop by drop, and that they are sinking beneath a process of painful exhaustion. But in Him there are no tokens of

the being overmastered, enfeebled, or worn down. In that mangled and bleeding body, there seems, to all appearance, as much animation as though there had not been going on, for hours, an assault on the citadel of life. Let us watch his last moments, let us observe his last act. But those moments are over, whilst we thought them yet distant; He has suddenly expired, though an instant ago there was no sign of death. How is this? how, but that He has indeed proved the truth of his assertion, "No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself!" an assertion which could be true of no one who had not an actual lordship over life, who was not, in fact, his own source of life, who was not in fact the Author of life. He has retained his spirit whilst He chose; He has dismissed that spirit when He would; and thus, though in the form of a creature, He has exercised the prerogative of the Creator.

The cross, then, with all its shame, the act of dissolution, with all its fearfulness, bears as strong attestation to the essential Deity of Christ, as the most amazing miracle performed, or the fullest prophecy accomplished. And we bow before a Being, as more than human, as nothing less than divine, who died by his own act, though nailed to a cross; by an effort of his own will, though beneath the hands of fierce executioners: we hail Him, even in the midst of ignominy, as "the image of the invisible God," seeing that He could forbid the departure of

the soul whilst there remained a prediction unfulfilled, and command it into paradise the moment that He saw that all things were accomplished.

Now they have not, we think, been either uninteresting or unimportant truths which we have thus derived from the fact that Christ complained of thirst on the cross, on purpose "that the Scripture might be fulfilled." But we have yet to fix your thoughts more particularly on Christ as an example, exhorting you to observe how engrossed He was with the work of redemption, how intent, up to the last moment of life, on performing the will of the Father who sent Him. You must not think that, because Jesus had such power over his own life as we have just now described—a power which made Him inaccessible to death, except so far as He chose to give death permission—He did not suffer acutely as He hung upon the cross. It is true that crucifixion never could have killed Him, and that He did not die of the torture and exhaustion thereby produced; but nevertheless it is, on this very account, true, that his sufferings must have vastly exceeded those of the malefactors crucified with Him. So far as the natural effects of crucifixion were concerned, He was not necessarily nearer dying when He died than when first fastened to the tree. But what does this prove, except that, retaining from first to last all his sensibilities, He must, from first to last, have endured the same exquisite torments? whereas, had He been dying, just as the thieves on either side of Him were,

He would gradually have become faint through loss of blood, and excess of pain, and thus have been less and less sensitive to the pangs of dissolution.

Thus, in keeping the vital principle in undiminished vigour up to the moment of the departure of the soul, Christ did but keep undiminished the inconceivable anguish of being nailed to the cross; crucifixion, as it were, was momentarily repeated, and the agony of each instant was the agony of the first. Yet even to this did the Mediator willingly submit: for had He allowed Himself the relief of exhaustion, his faculties would have been numbed, and He had full need of these, that He might finish in death what He had been engaged on in life. What an example did He thus set us, that we decline every indulgence which might possibly incapacitate us for doing God's work, and submit cheerfully to every inconvenience which may attend its performance! Oh, never were the Redeemer's love, and zeal, and patience so conspicuous as throughout those dark hours when He hung upon the tree. He might have died at once; and we dare not say that even then our redemption would not have been complete. There would have been equally the shedding of precious blood, and equally perhaps the expiatory offering, had He sent his soul into the separate state the instant that his body had been nailed to the cross. But He would tarry in tribulation, that He might survey his vast undertaking, gather up the fragments, anticipate every possible objection, and

bequeath the material of conviction to all who were not obstinately bent on infidelity.

What hearts must ours be, that we can look so coldly on the sufferer—suffering “for us men and for our salvation!” His last thoughts, as his earliest had been, were on our deliverance, on our welfare. Even the words which He uttered, “that the Scripture might be fulfilled,” were as expressive of his mental as of his bodily feeling. Indeed He did thirst: “the zeal of thine house hath consumed me:” He was parched with longing for the glory of God and the safety of man. “I thirst:” I thirst to see of the travail of my soul; I thirst for the effects of my anguish, the discomfiture of Satan, the vindication of my Father, the opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Shall our last end be, in any measure, like this? Would that it might! Would that, when we come to die, we may thirst with the thirst of the Redeemer’s soul! “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” “My soul thirsteth for thee,” is an exclamation of the Psalmist, when declaring the ardency of his longings after God. And our Saviour endured thirst, that our thirst might be quenched. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth—“my heart,” saith He, “in the midst of my body, is even like melting wax”—that we, inhabitants naturally of “a dry and barren land,” might have access to the river of life, which, clear as crystal, pours itself through the paradise of God.

Who does not thirst for these waters? Ah, brethren, there is nothing required but that every one of us should be able, with perfect truth, to declare, "I thirst," and the Scripture shall be fulfilled in that man's drawing water out of the wells of salvation. For the invitations of the Bible presuppose nothing but a sense of want and a wish for relief. "Ho! every one that thirsteth"—there is the summons, there the description. Oh, that we may now thirst with a thirst for pardon, a thirst for reconciliation, a thirst for holiness. Then, when we come to die, we shall thirst for the joys of immortality—for the pleasures which are at God's right hand: we shall thirst, even as Christ did, that the Scripture may be fulfilled: and the Scripture shall be fulfilled; for, bowing the head and giving up the ghost, we shall be in his presence with whom is "the fountain of life;" and every promise that has cheered us here, shall be turned into performance to delight us for ever.

S E R M O N IX.

THE SECOND DELIVERY OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.

LUKE xi. 1.

“And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

THERE were two occasions on which our blessed Saviour delivered that form of prayer which is known by his name. The first was in his sermon on the mount, about the time of Pentecost; the second was in answer to the request made Him in the text, about the Feast of Tabernacles, many months afterwards. You are not to confound the two occasions, as though the Evangelists St. Matthew and St. Luke had but given different accounts of one and the same delivery. The occasions were wholly dissimilar, separated by a considerable interval of time: on the one, Christ gave the prayer of Himself, with nothing to lead to

it but his own wish to instruct; whereas, on the other, He was distinctly asked by one of his disciples, who probably did but speak in the name of the rest.

We cannot suppose that these disciples had forgotten the Lord's Prayer. Whether or not all now present had been present at the Sermon on the Mount, we may justly conclude that they were all well acquainted with the comprehensive form which Christ had delivered for the use of the Church. Why, then, did they ask for another form of prayer? and what are we to learn from Christ's meeting the wish by simply repeating that before given? These are not mere curious questions; you will presently see that they involve points of great interest and importance. Without advancing any conjectures, let us look at the Lord's Prayer as given in the Sermon on the Mount, and as here again given in answer to the request of the disciples: the comparison may furnish some clue which will guide us in our search.

Now we have spoken of the prayer delivered on the two occasions, as though it had been altogether the same: this however is not strictly the case; there are certain variations in the versions which should not be overlooked. Some of these, indeed, are very slight, requiring only to be mentioned, not examined; such as that, in the one, the word "debts" is used, in the other, "sins;" St. Luke says, "Give us day by day;" St. Matthew, "Give us this day,"

“our daily bread.” Such differences are evidently but differences in the mode of expression.

There is, however, one remarkable variation. On the second occasion of delivering his prayer, our Lord altogether omitted the doxology with which He had concluded it on the first. He quite left out, that is, the words, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” Now there can be little doubt, that, in constructing his form of prayer, Christ had respect to the religious usages of the Jews. It is said that a serious student of the Gospel, and one at the same time versed in Jewish antiquities, may trace, at every step, a designed conformity to the rules and practices of devotion which were at that time observed. Without attempting generally to prove this, it will be worth our while to consider what was the Jewish custom as to the conclusion of their prayers, whether public or private.

We find¹, that in the solemn services of the Temple, when the priests had concluded a prayer, the people were wont to make this response; “Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom for ever and ever.” Public prayer—prayer, that is, in the Temple, finished with a doxology very similar to that which concludes the Lord's Prayer. But this doxology was never used in more private prayer, prayer in a synagogue, or in a house. Observe, then: our Lord gives his prayer on

¹ Lightfoot, Talmudical Exercitations upon St. Matthew.

the first occasion with the doxology, on the second, without it: what may we infer from this? Surely, that He wished his disciples to understand that the prayer was designed both for public use and for private.

In the Sermon on the Mount the prayer had concluded with the doxology; and the disciples, we may believe, had thence gathered that the prayer was intended to be used in the Temple. But they still wanted a form for private devotion, and on this account, preferred the request which is contained in our text. Our Lord answers the request by giving them the same form, but with the omission of the doxology; thus teaching that his prayer was adapted to the closet as well as to the Church. If regard be had to Jewish usages, nothing can seem less objectionable than this explanation of the insertion of the doxology in one place and its omission in another. The prayer was delivered twice, to prove that it was to serve for public use and for private. Christ showed that it was to be a public prayer by giving it with a doxology; a private, by giving it without; for a doxology was that which was then used in the Temple, but not in a house.

And this further explains why our Lord did not add "Amen," in concluding his prayer on the second occasion. It was usual amongst the Jews not to add the Amen to prayers which were only petitionary, but to reserve it for expressions of thanksgiving and benediction; whereas, the doxology being omitted,

the Lord's prayer, you observe, became purely petitionary. There is evidence of this in the Book of Psalms: the book is full of prayers, but the prayers do not end with Amen. If the Psalmist use the Amen, it is after such an exclamation as this: "Blessed be the Lord for evermore." You may trace just the same custom in the writings of the Apostles. Thus St. Paul asks the speaker with tongues, "How shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen, at thy giving of thanks?" and it is generally after some ascription of praise, or expression of benediction, that he adds an Amen: "The Creator, who is blessed for ever, Amen." "Now the God of peace be with you all, Amen."

Now it is a fact of very great interest, which thus appears fairly established—namely, that the second delivery of the Lord's prayer, as compared with the first, goes to the proving that the petitions in this prayer are equally adapted to private and to public devotion; that we cannot find a more suitable or comprehensive form, whether for the gathering of "the great congregation," for domestic worship, or for the retirement of our closet. Our Lord did not indeed mean to tie us down to the use of this prayer, as though we were never to use any other, or never to expand into larger supplication. But He may certainly be thought to have given this prayer as a perpetual, universal model; and to have asserted its containing an expression for every want and every desire which may lawfully be made the subject of

petition unto God. There ought to be no debate as to the suitableness of this prayer for all places and seasons, after you have remarked the peculiarities of its double delivery. Do you doubt whether it be a form well adapted to the public assembly? then observe that its petitions were first uttered by our Lord, with such a doxology appended as was never then used but at the solemn gatherings in the temple of God. When you have hereby convinced yourselves of its suitableness for public worship, will you hesitate as to its fitness for more private occasions? for the devotional meetings of the family, or for your own secret communings with God? Then you resemble the disciples, who, having heard the Sermon on the Mount, yet imagined a need for a different form of prayer in their religious retirements. But surely it should teach you, that, at one time as well as at another, the Lord's prayer should find its way from the heart to the lip, to know that our blessed Saviour—omitting only the doxology, and thus consecrating to the use of the closet what He had before consecrated to the use of the Church—gave precisely the same form, in answer to the request of these disciples, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

But hitherto we have made no way in commenting on the text, except that we may have explained the request of the disciples—a request which has, at first, a strange look, as though Christ had not already delivered a form of prayer, or as though what He had

delivered were already forgotten. We remove this strange look, by observing our Lord's answer, and inferring from it that what the disciples now solicited was a form of private prayer: what they had previously received passed with them as designed for public occasions; and the second delivery of the same form, but with certain alterations, both shows us the want of the disciples, and teaches us how such want might best be supplied.

We will now, however, endeavour to bring before you certain other and very interesting truths, which are involved, more or less prominently, in the statements of the text. And, first, as to the employment of Christ when the disciples approach and prefer their request. There is nothing to show distinctly whether our blessed Redeemer had been engaged in private prayer, or had been praying with his followers. But we learn, from many statements of the Evangelists, that He was in the habit of retiring for purposes of private devotion: "He withdrew into the wilderness and prayed;" He "went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer;" He was "alone praying." And perhaps it agrees best with the expressions in our text, that we should suppose our Lord to have been engaged in solitary prayer: "As He was praying in a certain place." The disciples had probably been absent from Him, as when they left Him sitting on Jacob's well, whilst they went into the city to buy meat. On their return they behold Him at prayer: they draw reverently

back ; they would not intrude on Him at so sacred a moment. But the thought occurs to them—"Oh, what a time for obtaining a new lesson in prayer ; let us seize on it—let us ask Him to instruct us whilst, like Moses coming down from the mount, his face yet shines with celestial communings." They watch the opportunity—you see how it is stated: "When he *ceased*, one of his disciples said unto him." They appear to have stood at a distance, that they might not interrupt the solemn exercise ; but, so soon as they saw the exercise concluded, they pressed eagerly forward to share in its benefit.

But whether or not this were then the relative position of Christ and his disciples—whether He was alone praying, or whether they were praying with Him—we know, as we have already said, that our Lord was wont to engage in solitary prayer ; and there is no attitude, in which this Divine person is presented to us, wherein He is more wonderful, more deserving to be considered with all that is deepest, and most reverent, in attention. You expect to find Christ working miracles—for you know Him to be God in human form ; and you feel that He must give such credentials of his mission as shall suffice, if not to remove all unbelief, yet to leave it inexcusable. You even expect to find Him enduring anguish—for you know Him to have assumed human nature, that He might be capable of suffering ; and you thoroughly assent to the fundamental truth, that "without shedding of blood is no remission." But

you could hardly have expected to have found Him spending whole nights in prayer. What has that pure, that spotless Being, in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," to do with importunate supplication, as though He were in danger of offending his heavenly Father, or had to wring from a reluctant hand supplies of that grace, of which Himself is, after all, the everlasting fountain?

There is a mysteriousness about Christ praying, which should almost warn us back, as it seems to have warned the disciples. For we are not to suppose that our Redeemer's prayers were all similar to that which is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, and in which there is the calmness of an Intercessor who knows that He shall prevail, or who feels that He but asks what Himself has right to bestow. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, speaks of Him in language which obliges us to regard Him as having wrestled in prayer, wrestled even as one of us may wrestle, with much strain and anguish of mind. The Apostle there says of Christ: "Who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." There may be here a special reference to our Lord's agony in the garden, when, as you remember, He besought earnestly of the Father, that, if it were possible, the cup might pass from Him. But we have no right to confine the Apostle's statement to this particular

scene: we may rather conclude, that, when our blessed Saviour spent whole nights in prayer, his supplications were mingled with tears, and that it was with the deep emotions of one, who had blessings to procure through importunity, that He addressed Himself to his Father in heaven.

You may wonder at this—you may ask how this could be; and we can only answer, that, though the Redeemer was both God and man—two natures having been indissolubly joined in his one Divine person—yet, as man, He seems to have had the same battles to fight, the same assistance to depend upon, as though He had not also been God, but, like one of ourselves, had had the devil for his enemy, and only the Holy Ghost for his comforter. There is frequently a mistake upon this, and one which practically takes away from Christ's example all its power and persuasiveness. Why was Christ able to resist the devil? Why was Christ able to keep Himself "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners?" Because, many are ready to reply, He was God as well as man. But surely this must be an erroneous reply. It supposes that when He was exposed to temptation, the Divine nature in his person came to the assistance of the human, upheld it, and made it triumphant. And how then could Christ be an example to us, who, being merely men, cannot fly from one nature in ourselves to another, from the weaker to the stronger, when attacked by certain enemies, or exposed to certain dangers?

The scriptural representation is just the opposite to this. It sets before us Christ as having been as truly a man, as truly left as a man to a man's duties, a man's trials, a man's helps, as though, at the same time, all the fulness of Godhead had not dwelt in Him bodily. It was not to the Divine nature in his own person that He could have recourse when hard pressed by temptation: He had to lean, like one of ourselves, on the aids of the Holy Spirit, aids sought by prayer, and appropriated by faith. The Divine nature in his person appears to have had nothing to do with holding up the human, but only with the conferring infinite worth on its sufferings and actions: it did not give the patience to endure, though it gave the preciousness to the endurance; it did not give the strength to obey, but the untold merit to the obedience.

And, upon this representation, we can somewhat enter, though still but remotely, into the prayers of our blessed Redeemer. He was a man, with a man's infirmities, though not with a man's sinful propensities; living, as a man, the life of faith; fighting, as a man, the battle with principalities and powers; and He had before Him a task of immeasurable intenseness, which He could not contemplate, as a man, without a sense of awfulness, we had almost said of dread. In this his state of fearful warfare and tremendous undertaking, He had to have recourse to those assistances which are promised to ourselves, which we have to seek for by

prayer, and which even He, notwithstanding his oneness with the other persons in the Trinity, had to procure, to preserve, and to employ, through the same processes as the meanest of his disciples. Hence, it may be, his midnight watchings; hence his "strong crying and tears;" hence his prolonged and reiterated supplications.

And however mysterious, or actually incomprehensible, it may be, that a Being, as truly God as He was man, should, as man, have been as much thrown on a man's resources as though He had not also been God, yet what a comfort is it that Christ was thus identified with ourselves, that He went through our trials, met our dangers, and experienced our difficulties! We could have had but little confidence in committing our prayers to a high priest who had never had to pray himself. But, oh, how it should encourage us to wrestle in prayer, to be fervent and importunate in prayer, that it is just what our blessed Lord did before us; and that having, as our Mediator, known continually the agony of supplication, He must, as our Advocate, be all the more disposed, in the language of the Psalmist, to put our tears into his bottle, and to gain audience for our cries. It might strike me with greater amazement, to see Christ raise the dead. It might fill me with deeper awe, to behold Christ upon the cross. But it ministers most to my comfort, to look at Christ upon his knees. Then I most know Him as my brother in all but my sinfulness, myself in all but

the corruption which would have disabled Him for being my deliverer.

Oh, let it be with us as with the disciples; let us gaze on the Redeemer as He is "praying in a certain place;" and we shall be more than ever encouraged to the asking from Him whatsoever we can need. Then we have Him in the attitude which should give confidence, let our want be what it may; especially if it be a freer breathing of the soul—and this breathing is prayer—which we desire to obtain. Christ will sometimes seem so great, so far removed from ourselves, that the timid want courage to address Him. Even suffering hardly appears to bring Him down to our level; if He weep, it is over our sins that his tears fall, and not over his own; if He is stricken, it is that by his stripes we may be healed; if He die, it is that we may live. But when He prays, He prays for Himself. Not but that He also prays for others, and even we, too, are required to do this. But He prays for Himself, though He does not suffer for Himself. He has wants of his own for which He asks a supply, dangers against which He seeks protection, difficulties in which He entreats guidance. Oh, who will now be afraid of going to Him to be taught? Who will not feel, as He sees Jesus "praying in a certain place," that now is the precious moment for casting ourselves before Him, and exclaiming with the disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples?"

Now it is a very important use which has thus

been made of the text, in that the approach of the disciples to the Saviour, at the moment of his rising from prayer, serves to admonish us as to Christ's power of sympathy, "in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted;" and to encourage us to go to Him in the full assurance of his being as well able to understand, as to satisfy, our wants. But there is still a very beautiful account to which to turn the fact, that it was immediately on his rising from his knees, that our Lord delivered, for the second time, his form of prayer to his disciples. There was, as we have already hinted, an evident appropriateness in the request of the disciples, if you consider it relatively to the employment in which Christ had just been engaged. It was not a request to be taught how to preach—that might have been the more suitable had Christ just delivered his Sermon on the Mount. It was not a request to be enabled to work miracles—that might have more naturally followed, had Christ just been healing the sick or casting out devils. But it was a request for instruction in prayer, coming immediately on Christ's having been praying, as though the disciples felt that He must then have known most of the difficulties of prayer, and also of its privileges; and that, his soul having been engaged in high communion with God, his tongue might be expected to clothe itself with the richest expressions of desire, and the most potent words of entreaty.

And you will all feel how natural, or rather, how just, was this thought of the disciples, that the best

moment for a lesson from Christ in prayer, was when Christ Himself had just finished praying. It is precisely the thought which we ourselves should entertain, and on which we should be ready to act, in regard of any eminent saint from whom we might wish instruction and assistance. If, feeling my want of some other form of prayer than that which I possessed, I determined to apply to a Christian distinguished by his piety, and to ask him to compose for me a form, at what moment, if I might choose, would I prefer my request? At the moment of his rising from his knees. When, I should say to myself, is his mind so likely to be in a devotional attitude, when may I so justly expect the frame and the feeling adapted to the dictating pregnant and prevailing petitions, as when he is fresh from the footstool of God, and has not yet lost the unction which may be believed to have been on him, as he communed with Heaven?

But, were I to address myself to him at this moment with my request, and were he, in reply, simply, but solemnly, to repeat to me the Lord's Prayer, what should I conclude? Certainly that, in his judgment, and when moreover that judgment was best circumstanced for deciding, no prayer could be composed so admirably adapted to the expression of my wants as this; and that, having this, I required no other. It is a separate question whether his decision would be right: we now only urge, that, in no

conceivable method, could he deliver a stronger testimony to the excellence of the Lord's Prayer.

But this is exactly the kind of testimony which is furnished by the circumstances related in our text. Christ, on rising from his knees, is asked by his disciples for a form of prayer adapted to seasons of private devotion. He does nothing but repeat the prayer which He had delivered in his Sermon on the Mount. What an evidence that no better could be furnished! Fresh as He was from direct intercourse with his Father in heaven, the spirit warmed, if we may so speak, through devotional exercise, He could furnish no fuller, no more comprehensive expression of the wants and desires, which, as creatures, we may spread before our Creator, than the few and brief petitions which He had combined on a previous occasion.

There is nothing which gives me so exalted an idea of the worth and excellence of the Lord's Prayer as this. In many ways, indeed, may this worth and excellence be demonstrated; every new demonstration not only establishing the points in debate, but suggesting material for additional proof. And we owe much to commentaries on the Lord's Prayer by learned and pious men, who, expanding its several petitions, have shown that there is nothing which we can lawfully desire, whether for this world or for the next, whether as inhabitants of earth or as candidates for heaven, which is not virtually contained in these

few sentences. Other forms of prayer, so far as they are scriptural and sound, are but the Lord's Prayer beaten out, its syllables spread, as they may be, into volumes. Indeed, there is no slight analogy between this prayer and the law. The law was given twice, even as this prayer was given twice. The law, meaning thereby the Ten Commandments, is a summary of all things to be done; and this prayer, of all things to be desired. The law divides itself into duties which have respect to God and duties which have respect to man; and, similarly, the prayer contains petitions for God's honour, and then petitions for others and ourselves. And as the few precepts of the moral law, when expounded by our blessed Redeemer, grew—like the few loaves which, beneath his creative touch, became the food of thousands—till there was a command for every action, yea, a rule for each word and each thought; so has the prayer only to be drawn out by a spiritual apprehension, and there is a breathing for every want, an expression for every desire, an ejaculation for every emergence.

But whilst all this may be satisfactorily shown through lengthened and patient inquiry, and whilst we may hereby reach conviction of such a fulness and such a comprehensiveness in the Lord's Prayer, that we ask every thing which we ought to ask in offering its petitions, the short, but equally sure, mode of establishing the fact, is to observe how this prayer was the second time delivered. I am never so impressed with the beauty, the depth, the largeness,

yea, the inexhaustibleness of this form, as when I hear it uttered by Christ in reply to the request of his disciples. If I ever feel wearied by repetitions of this prayer, or tempted to think that some variation from it would be an improvement, I can look at the circumstances of its second delivery, and want no other commentary to convict me of error. It is not the first delivery which is so replete and reproachful in evidence. I receive indeed the prayer with all docility, and all reverence, as it falls from the Saviour's lips in his Sermon on the Mount. But He then delivered it as a form for public prayer, suited to numbers who might not have made much progress in religion: had He been afterwards asked, He might have furnished a yet intenser and more spiritual model, for such as were of higher growth in piety. Besides, our Lord was then preaching; and the temperament, if we may use the expression, of the preacher, is not likely to be that which is most adapted to prayer. Without confounding the Redeemer with one of ourselves, we may, in a measure, justly reason from ourselves, when considering what occupation is most congenial with devotional feeling. And, certainly, the attitude of an instructor does not commend itself as best suited to the spirit of a suppliant. If I wanted tuition from a preacher in prayer, I should not wish it from him whilst he was preaching, not even though prayer might be the subject of his sermon. I would go to him in his closet rather than in his pulpit; that, in the more subdued

tone of mind, in the calmer, the more chastened and abased sentiments which may be expected in a man prostrate before God, as compared with the same man haranguing his fellow men, I might have better ground of hope for those contrite expressions, those burdened cadences, those glowing aspirations, which befit the supplications of one fallen but redeemed. And it is in no sense derogatory to the blessed Redeemer, to say, that if I had had only his sermon-delivery of his prayer, it would not, of itself, have convinced me that even He could not have given a more admirable form. I might have felt, and without violation to the awe and reverence due to such a Being, that the moment when I should have best liked to hear Him express Himself in prayer, was not the moment of his upbraiding the hypocrites who stood "in the corners of the streets," or the heathen who were noted for their "vain repetitions."

But the prayer is given a second time, after considerable interval, given that it may serve for private devotion; given by Christ, not when addressing a multitude, but when just risen from his knees. Oh, I want nothing further to tell me, that the Lord's prayer is fuller than human need can exhaust, humbler than human worthlessness can sink, higher than human piety can soar. I ask no learned commentary, no laboured exposition; I have Christ's own testimony, given exactly when that testimony has the greatest possible power, that nothing can be added to the prayer, nothing excogitated of loftier, intenser,

more disinterested, and yet more self-seeking supplication, when I find that it was when He had been "praying in a certain place," and as "he ceased" from his prayer, that He re-delivered the same form to his disciples, and in answer to their intreaty, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

Now you will all feel for yourselves that the practical point involved in this express and striking testimony of Christ to the fulness of his prayer, and its appropriateness to all persons, places, and seasons, is, that there must be something wrong in the man who finds the Lord's prayer insufficient or unsuitable. We are far from meaning that no other form of prayer should be used: the mind will often wish, will often need, to dwell on some one particular desire; and though, beyond question, that desire has expression in the Lord's prayer, it is there so condensed that he who would be importunate at the mercy-seat may be aided by a more expanded statement.

But, at all events, enough has been adduced to prove that the Lord's prayer should enter largely both into public and private devotion, and that, though it ought not to supersede every other, yet ought no other to be a substitute for it. And if we had but a minute to spend in prayer, what but the Lord's prayer should occupy that minute? better that we gather into that minute all that can be asked for time and for eternity, than that we give it to any less pregnant expression of the wants and desires of a

Christian. But examine yourselves in this matter; compare your own sense of the sufficiency of the Lord's prayer with the remarkable attestation to that sufficiency which we have found given by our Saviour Himself: and if the prayer still seem to you inadequate; if, in short, you feel as though you could not pray sufficiently, if, on any account, you were actually limited to the use of this prayer, then let the comparison set you on the searching deeply into the state of your hearts. For, surely, he has reason to fear that his desires should be checked rather than cherished, his wants denied rather than declared, who can find no expression for them in petitions which were not only dictated by Christ, but affirmed by Him to comprehend whatsoever we might ask.

But, commending this to your serious meditation, we would, in conclusion, dwell for a moment on the reference made by the disciples to the instruction in prayer which had been furnished by the Baptist. They ask, you observe, of Christ, that He would teach them to pray "as John also taught his disciples." We have no means of ascertaining what form of prayer had been given by the Baptist. But it should be observed that the Jews' daily and common prayers, their ordinary and occasional, consisted chiefly of benedictions and doxologies; they had, indeed, their petitionary or supplicatory prayers; but these were few in number, and less copious. Now it seems reasonable to suppose that the Baptist taught a form of prayer differing from what the

Jewish forms were ; he had to inculcate other doctrines than those to which the people were used ; and it can hardly, therefore, be doubted that he instructed them to pray in a manner more accordant with the new dispensation which he was commissioned to announce as “at hand.” If, standing as he did between the law and the Gospel, John did not fully unfold the peculiar truths which Christ was afterwards to announce, he nevertheless spake of things, the attaining which supposed that petitions were presented unto God—how then can we question that he taught his followers to pray for these things?

Hence, the probability, at least, is, that in opposition to the custom of the Jews, whose prayers were mostly benedictory, John gave his disciples prayers which were chiefly petitionary ; and that, when our Lord was asked for instruction in prayer, similar to what had been afforded by the Baptist, the thing sought was some form of supplication, strictly and properly so called. And this agrees excellently with the answer of our Lord ; for by omitting the doxology with which He had concluded his prayer on the first delivery, He gave a form of devotion which was purely petitionary.

But the disciples of Christ may not have referred to the particular character of the form of prayer given by John, but only to the fact, that the Baptist had furnished his followers with some form or another. And then there is something very interesting in their request, as grounding itself on what had

been done by a teacher of far less authority and wisdom than their own. It was as much as to say, even "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" gave lessons in prayer; and shall not the voice of Him of whom that stern voice was the harbinger, instruct us how to approach the Lord of the whole earth? The disciples of the forerunner had the privilege of hearing from him what petitions should be offered—shall not the disciples of the Messiah enjoy a similar privilege, though greater in proportion as He is greater than his messenger?

There is then an argument, so to speak, from the instruction afforded by the inferior teacher, to that which may be expected, or hoped for, from the superior. And it is an argument of which we may legitimately make use, whether as pledging God to give, or emboldening us to ask. We may rightly reason that, if the disciples of the lower master have been favoured with a lesson, the disciples of the higher will not be left uninstructed. We may rightly reason, yea, we may present ourselves before our Saviour with the reasoning on our lips, that if, not only the disciples of the Baptist, but the disciples also of natural religion, have been taught to pray, the disciples of the Christ shall be yet more deeply and powerfully schooled.

We have sat, as it were, at the feet of nature; and in her every work and her every gesture, in her silences and in her utterances, she has bidden us wait upon God, and seek at his hands the supply of our

wants. There is nothing on which creation is more eloquent, nothing more syllabled by the animate and the inanimate, by the music of its mighty movements, the rush of its forces, the lowing of its herds, than that all things hang on the universal parent, and that His ear is open to the universal petition. And if even nature do thus instruct us to pray, what may we not expect from the Lord our Redeemer? We will approach Him, encouraged by the tuition of a prophet, which is, at best, but his messenger or herald. We will say to Him, Even the stars, the forests, and the mountains, the works of thine Almighty hands, bid us bow the knee, and supplicate the invisible God. But we need a higher, a more spiritual, lesson. Lord, do Thou teach us to pray, seeing that even nature hath taught her disciples.

S E R M O N X.

PECULIARITIES IN THE MIRACLE IN THE COASTS OF
DECAPOLIS.

MARK vii. 33, 34.

“And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.”

WE do not bring the succeeding verse into our text. You know that the words which we have read to you relate to the Lord our Redeemer; and you need not be told, that, with Him, to attempt was to accomplish a miracle. The subject of the present miracle was “one that was deaf and had an impediment in his speech;” and the result of our Lord’s command, “Ephphatha,” was, that “straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.”

The miracles of our Lord were as diversified as are

human wants and infirmities: what sorrow was there for the soothing of which, what sickness for the healing of which, He did not employ his supernatural powers? But the miracles were diversified, not only as to the things done, but as to the manner also in which they were done: sometimes, indeed for the most part, our Lord only spake the word or laid his hand on the suffering; at other times, virtue went out from Him, when touched by the afflicted; and in some few instances, amongst which is that recorded in the text, He employed outward signs, though not such as could have possessed any natural efficacy.

We doubt not that many useful lessons might be drawn from the different modes wherein Christ thus displayed his miraculous power. Considering miracles as parables, figurative exhibitions of the doctrines, as well as forcible evidences of the divine origin, of Christianity, we may believe that they are not void of instruction in the minutest of their circumstances, but furnish, in every particular, something on which the Christian may meditate with advantage. Neither is this true only when you assign a parabolic character to the miracles of our Lord: setting aside the parabolic character, and observing merely how difference in mode was adapted to difference in circumstances, you will often find occasion to admire a display of wisdom and benevolence, to confess the narrative profitable, not only as adding another testimony to the divine power of Christ, but as showing how He sought to make that power sub-

serve his great design of bringing sinners to faith in Himself.

We shall find this exemplified as we proceed with the examination of the narrative which we have taken as our subject of discourse. Our foregoing observations will have prepared you for our not insisting on the display of divine power, but engaging you with the peculiarities which attended the display—peculiarities from which we shall endeavour to extract evidences of Christ's goodness, and lessons for ourselves. With this purpose in view, let us go straightway to the scene presented by the Evangelist: let us follow the Redeemer as He takes the deaf man aside from the multitude, and let us observe, with the attentiveness due to the actions of One who did "all things well," the course which He adopts in unstopping his ears and loosening his tongue.

Now you must all be aware, that, in order to constitute a miracle, properly so called, there must be the absence of all instrumentality which is naturally adapted to produce the result. Sickness may be removed by the application of remedies; but he who applies them is never regarded as working a miracle; he may, indeed, excite surprise by using means which shall be rapidly effectual in a case which had been thought desperate, but, whatever the tribute paid to his science and skill, the whole virtue is assumed to lie in the remedies employed; and no one imagines, when looking on the recovered individual, that there has been anything approaching to the exercise of

supernatural power. But if the applied remedies were such as had evidently no tendency to the effecting a cure, you would begin to suspect something of miraculous agency; and yet further, if no remedies whatsoever were used, if the sickness departed at the mere bidding of the physician, you would be almost sure that God had distinctly and unusually interfered—interfered so as to suspend the known laws which ordinarily determine his workings. So long, perhaps, as any remedy appeared to be applied, you would be scrupulous as to admitting a miracle; the remedy might, indeed, seem quite unsuited to the end for which it was employed, not possessing any known virtue for removing the disease; but still it might possess properties not before ascertained; and it is easier, and perhaps juster, to conclude the sickness overcome through some unsuspected energy in the visible means, than through some invisible power altogether unconnected with those means.

Hence it is a necessary criterion in the determining a miracle, that it be altogether independent on second causes, and therefore be performed without any natural instrument. And this is a criterion to which the miracles of our Lord may safely be brought: it was only on one or two occasions that any thing external was employed, and even on these it could not be suspected that means were applied in which any virtue dwelt. The most remarkable of such occasions was that of the healing of the man who had been born blind: our Lord “spat upon the ground,

and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." Here there was a great deal of preparation: and had not the case been that of blindness from the birth, which was accounted incurable through any natural means, it might have been suspected that Christ had applied some powerful ointment, which, left for a time on the defective organ, and then washed off, would effect, as He had discovered, a radical cure. Even in this case, however, it never seems to have occurred to the Jews, that the thing which had been wrought might not have been actually supernatural: the whole process was accurately reported to the Pharisees; but, though they were most eager to disprove or depreciate the cure, they never thought of ascribing any virtue to the clay; it was manifestly so void of all natural efficacy for the restoration of sight, that they treated the cure as wrought by a word, without even the apparent employment of any second cause.

Nevertheless, we may safely admit, that, had our Lord always acted in this manner, had He never performed a miracle without using some outward instrumentality, there might have been room for suspecting that a connexion existed between the instrumentality and the result, and that, therefore, it was not necessarily beyond a doubt, that miracle had been actually wrought. There can, however, be no place for such a suspicion, inasmuch as the occasions were very rare on which our Lord did more than speak that word

which was always "with power." But we are bound to consider whether, in the few cases where external application was employed, there was not some reason for the seeming departure from a rule, which may be said to have been prescribed by the very nature of miracle. If we find this reason in any one case, it may, probably, be extended to all; and we shall therefore confine ourselves to the instance presented by our subject of discourse.

Here, as in the case of the blind man, there was an external appliance, though not equally calculated to suggest doubt as to the actualness of the miracle. Our Lord put his fingers into the man's ears, and then spat, and touched his tongue. It could hardly be imagined, by the most suspicious or incredulous of beings, that there was any natural connexion between what our Lord thus did, and the effect which was produced; and that, consequently, Christ was nothing but a skilful physician, acquainted with remedies which had not yet been discovered by others of his race. If there were any virtue in the action used by Christ, it was manifestly a virtue derived altogether from his superhuman character: allowing that there was power in his touch, it could only have been from the same reason that there was power in his word: the finger was "the finger of God," even as the voice was that which had spoken all things into being.

Yet it could not have been without any meaning, though it may have been without any efficaciousness to the healing of disease, that Christ employed these

outward signs: some purpose must have been subserved, forasmuch as we may be sure that there was never any thing useless or superfluous in the actions of our Lord. And the reason why Christ thus touched the defective organs, before uttering the word which was to speak them into health, may be found, as is generally allowed, in the circumstances of the man on whom the miracle was about to be wrought. This man, you will observe, does not seem to have come to Christ of his own accord: it is expressly stated, "And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech, and they beseech him to put his hand upon him." The whole was done by the relatives or friends of the afflicted individual: for any thing that appears to the contrary, he himself may have had no knowledge of Jesus; and, indeed, since his condition disqualified him for holding any conversation, it is likely that he was in a great degree ignorant of the Prophet that had risen in the land.

But this very fact rendered it important that means should be taken to acquaint him thoroughly with the person that effected his cure, not only in order to his own satisfaction, but to qualify him to bear witness in favour of Christ. And it is easily seen that what our Lord did was exactly adapted to such a purpose as this. He took him aside from the multitude, because his attention was likely to be distracted by the crowd, and Christ wished to fix it on Himself as the author of his cure. Had He healed

him immediately, and in the midst of the throng, the man might have had no distinct impression as to who had been his benefactor. Therefore was he separated from the throng; and therefore, yet further, when separated, was he addressed by Christ through those senses which remained unimpaired—through sight and through touch. Christ could not speak to him, as was his ordinary wont, and demand from him a confession of faith in his power to heal; the man was deaf, so that no question could be put to him, and he had an impediment in his speech which would have prevented his replying. But he could see, and he could feel what Christ did; and therefore our Lord supplied the place of speech, by touching the tongue and putting his fingers into the ears—for this was virtually saying that He was about to act on those organs—and, by looking up to heaven, for this was informing the deaf man that the healing power must come from above.

The whole action would seem to have been symbolical, and accurately suited to the circumstances of the case. Translate the action into words, and what have we but such sayings as these? “I have taken thee aside from the multitude, that thou mightest observe and remember who it is to whom thou hast been brought. Thine organs are imperfect: here are members of thy body, which are useless to the ends for which they were given, and I am about to act on them with a power which shall supply all defects. Yet I would have thee know that this power is but a

credential of my having come forth from God, and should produce in thee belief of my prophetic character. Behold, therefore: I lift my eyes unto heaven, whilst I utter the word which shall give thee hearing and speech."

Such, we say, was virtually the address of our Lord to the man on whom He was about to operate with supernatural power; not an address in language, which was precluded by the peculiarities of the case, but in significative, symbolical action, which is often to the full as expressive as words. And, therefore, it was not without a great design and an important meaning that our Lord departed from his ordinary rule, and ran, as it might have seemed, the risk of bringing the miracle into question, by the privacy in which He wrought it and the external agency of which He made use. How easily might it have been said that He took the man aside from the multitude, because what He was about to do would not bear being inspected, but involved some deception which could succeed only in a corner. And if suspicion had been excited by his thus requiring a retired place for the performance of the cure, how might that suspicion have been confirmed, when the man came to tell in what way he had been healed? "See," the people might have said, "there was no miracle at all; He applied certain remedies, and He would not suffer us to be near lest we should discover his secret."

But Christ could venture to brave all this risk: his miraculous power was too well established to be

treated as a trick. Some there were who blasphemously ascribed it to Satan; but none, as it would seem, had the hardihood to deny its existence. Yet even the appearance of place for suspicion would not have been given, without sufficient cause, by one who was anxious to leave no possible excuse for the doubting whether or not He were the promised Messiah. And the sufficient cause is found in the circumstances of the case. It did not content the Redeemer to heal bodily infirmities: He sought to reach the inward man through what He did for the outward. If He gave the power of hearing and of speaking, He longed that the unstopped ear might hearken to the Gospel, and the loosened tongue be employed on the high praises of God. But, in order to such ends, it was indispensable that the man should know Jesus as his benefactor, and be persuaded that the power, exerted on his behalf, was wholly from above. But how shall he be instructed in such particulars? He is shut up in that desolation and loneliness, which a closed ear and a fastened tongue necessarily produce, and is not accessible through the avenues by which information is commonly conveyed. I will speak to him, the Redeemer seems to say, through the senses which have been spared to him: sight and touch shall be instrumental to the carrying of truth into his yet darkened soul. O blessed Saviour, how great was thy condescension, how unwearied thine endeavour to do good to sinners! As when Thou wouldest teach thy disciples

humility, Thou didst set a little child in the midst of them; and when Thou wouldest warn them of the peril of unfruitfulness, Thou didst cause the blighted fig-tree to stand in their path—so now didst Thou graciously instruct by significative action; and I see nothing but the merciful, the compassionate, the patient Redeemer, bent on doing good, on instructing and blessing the unworthiest, when I see our Lord taking the deaf man aside from the multitude, and putting his fingers into his ears, and touching his tongue, and looking up to heaven.

But we have probably said enough in explanation of our Lord's having apparently made use of external instrumentality in effecting the miracle which is under review. We now wish to lead you to a wholly different topic: we would have it observed whether the possession of miraculous power did not operate upon Christ in a manner unlike that in which it would, most probably, operate on ourselves. We will not examine whether, if any one of us were gifted with the ability of doing marvellous things, he would not be likely to covet occasions of display, to delight in opportunities of manifesting the energy, when it would excite most amazement, and be hailed with the plaudits of a thousand spectators. Certainly, it were hardly to exaggerate that corruption which adheres to the best of the children of men, to say that the temptation would be found very strong of exerting miraculous power in an ostentatious mode, employing it to purposes which might astonish

by their strangeness, and before multitudes whose applauses might be thereby secured. And, just as certainly, there can be nothing further removed from ostentation, than our Lord's use of those wonder-working powers with which He was endowed. His miracles were always remarkable for simplicity, for the absence of every appearance of pompous exhibition : He never wrought a marvel but when there was good to be done ; and, in his hands, superhuman might was manifestly consecrated to the benefiting others, and not to the magnifying Himself.

But let us admit that miraculous power might be possessed by one of ourselves, and that, along with it, there might be such measure of grace as would prevent any thing of pride or ostentation in its use. We may still find something to distinguish this man of superhuman energy from the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to this, let us ask any one of you, whether the inability to relieve misery be not almost as distressing as that misery itself ? If I found one of my fellow-creatures dying from want, what wretchedness should I endure if I were absolutely destitute of all power of procuring him food ! Whereas, on the other hand, with what unmingled gladness should I hasten to his dwelling, if I carried with me the means of supplying his necessities, if I had only to open the door, and plenty would flow into the dreary abode ! I do not think that I could be sad at such a moment. My own cares might be many, my own grievances heavy ; but that I could communicate happiness,

would for the time make me happy; and the eye would be bright, and the voice would be joyous, as I said to the sufferer, "Be of good cheer."

The like may especially be affirmed in regard of any case of sickness. How melancholy is it to stand over the bed of one writhing in pain, and to feel that the best which the best affection can do, is to weep and to pray; so utterly beyond all known remedies or assuagements is the malady whose victim is before us! O for the power of working a miracle! With what alacrity, what exultation, would any one of us command the disease to depart, if there were such energy in his word that it could suspend nature's laws. I am sure that there is not one of you, who, if he possessed the power, and heard of a fellow-creature in terrible anguish, would not rush to the side of the sufferer, eager to employ the power on his behalf, and enraptured with the thought of being able to relieve. Or, if the case were not one of acute pain, but only of defect in some bodily organ, with what pure, what unmixed satisfaction, should we exert ourselves on supplying what nature had denied.

There is something wonderfully interesting, but, at the same time, distressing, in the visiting the asylums which have been reared for the reception of the blind or the dumb. It is marvellous to observe what mental and moral progress may be made in spite of the deficiency; how the senses, which are possessed, may be available to the very offices of those which are wanting, so that the blind child shall read the Bible

with its fingers, and the dumb communicate in writing all that passes in its spirit. We do not hesitate to call it the finest exercise of a power, which is only just short of supernatural, that, when the eye refuses to collect the rays from the material creation, the hand can be instructed to gather in all the beauty and magnificence of that spiritual landscape which God hath developed in the pages of his word; and that upon the soul, which seemed devoted to everlasting midnight, because not accessible through the medium of speech, there is poured, through the eye, all that mighty illumination which hath flashed, in these last days, from "the Father of lights."

But, with every confession of the wonderfulness and beauty of the spectacle presented by an asylum whether for the blind or the dumb, it must be admitted that there is something distressing in the sight of numbers who never looked on the glory of the heavens, or never drank in the melody of speech. Which of you, then, would not feel himself a happy man, if suddenly invested with the power of bidding the blind behold the human face, and the dumb hear and use the human voice? We should all perhaps be ready to charge the possessor of such a power with something worse than stoicism, with a hardness of heart which made it strange that God should have endowed him with so signal a gift, if he did not manifest the greatest alacrity in bestowing sight on the darkened eye-ball, and unchaining the speechless tongue; or if, when exercising his power, he did not show that to

exercise it was a source of the intensest delight. And yet, my brethren, it does not appear—at least, not always—to have been with a feeling of pleasure that our blessed Lord relieved the woes to which flesh is heir. Oh, it is a strange contrast between the scene presented by our text and what probably would be the scene, if any amongst ourselves had the power of healing the deaf and the dumb. It shall be to one of you that this poor man is brought by anxious and supplicating friends. One of you shall be reputed able to unstop his ears and loosen his tongue; and therefore shall they, who are eager for his cure, come to you imploringly. It is no false rumour; you have the power; you are ready to exercise it. I see you rejoice in the opportunity; you can hardly speak the healing word for gladness at being able to confer so great a boon. Yes; this is natural, this would almost seem unavoidable; and yet, oh wonderful, it was not thus that our Redeemer did good. He manifested no feeling of pleasure. On the contrary, you might have thought it a pain to Him to relieve misery; for the narrative tells us, that, at the instant of giving utterance to the omnipotent word, He showed signs as of a burdened and disquieted spirit: “He sighed”—not, He smiled; not, He rejoiced—but “He sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.”

Now we really do not know a more affecting testimony to the fact, that our Lord was “a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief,” than is thus furnished

by his sighing at the moment of working a benevolent miracle. If ever He experienced gladness of spirit, you would think that it must have been when communicating happiness—yet even then “He sighed.” He sighed in the act of blessing, as though the boon were wrung from Him, and He would rather have denied it. Neither is this a solitary instance of Christ’s manifestation of grief when engaged in giving pleasure. We have often had occasion to point out to you that the tears, which He wept at the grave of Lazarus, were not tears for the dead. There is no necessity, in order to the establishing the comforting truths of Christ’s perfect humanity, and of his sympathy with our griefs, that we should suppose Him weeping at the grave of his friend, as any one of us might weep over a kinsman or child. Indeed, there is no argument for Christ’s fellow-feeling with the bereaved, in the tears of which the bereaved so often make mention; for there is not one of us who could bewail the dead, if he were under the precise circumstances of Christ; and therefore the Mediator’s tears can be no evidence of that which, blessed be his name, is incontestably established from other proofs, his thorough sympathy with the mourning. Send any one of you to the grave where a dear friend lies buried—send him with the power, and for the purpose, of reanimating that friend—and he could not weep as he went; at least, if he wept, they would be tears of joy which he shed; for pleasure, like pain, can force drops from eyes which have been darkened

by sin. But the tears of Christ were not tears of joy; for we read not only that He wept, but that "He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled;" and that "again groaning in himself, he came to the grave." Hence there is no parrying the conclusion, that our blessed Saviour was unhappy at the very moment when you would most have expected Him to be happy, because on the point of making others happy; whilst all our foregoing statements, as to the pleasure which would be felt by any one of ourselves in the exercise of supernatural power, are only the more forcible, if the occasion of that exercise might bear any resemblance to the raising of Lazarus.

It is, therefore, no undue inference from the circumstance of Christ's sighing at the instant of working the miracle before us, when we take it in evidence of a depression of spirit which would not give way before even that most happy-making thing, the making others happy. And again must we state that of all the incidental proofs—proofs not the less conclusive because easily overlooked—of our Lord's having been "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," there is, perhaps, none of a more touching or plaintive character than is thus furnished by our text. Undoubtedly we vastly underrate the sufferings of the Saviour, when we confine them to scenes where persecution was open, and anguish apparent. Just because there is little said of what Jesus endured until we reach the dread things of Gethsemane and Calvary, it were strange, it were sinful, to conclude

that He was not heavily oppressed through the whole of his life. When an Apostle bids us "consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself"—thus making "the contradiction of sinners," which was not the thing of a moment, but of his every day, from first to last, the description of his endurances—he may be said to assert that suffering was his unmingled portion, as though, with one of old, his own illustrious type, He might pathetically have said, "My tears have been my meat day and night." And we may not question that such was his portion. He was a sacrifice from the cradle to the grave; every instant, because an instant of humiliation and endurance, added something to the mysterious and mighty oblation. How could it have been otherwise? for having come "unto his own," and being rejected by "his own," living in the midst of "a wicked and adulterous generation," which He vainly strove to save from destruction, there must continually have been a pressure on his innocent spirit, a pressure all the more intense, because not betrayed by any outward sign.

The expression "acquainted with grief" is wonderfully touching, and perhaps singularly accurate. Grief was, as it were, his bosom friend; it had made way into his breast, and there set up its home. His was not an occasional meeting with grief; it was acquaintance, a deep, dark, bitter familiarity. Oh, when you call Christ's afflictions to mind, afflictions endured "for us men and for our salvation," then

think not only of the garden and the cross; consider Him as having been incessantly, as well as intensely, disquieted—momentarily on the cross, whence divine justice sought the penalties which ourselves had deserved. And if you want evidence of this continuousness of sorrow, the inconsiderable incident—inconsiderable only in that you might read it a hundred times and hardly pause to observe it—the inconsiderable incident mentioned in our text might suffice as a proof. What so gratifying a thing as the being able to do good? when can a good man feel so happy as in communicating happiness? If Christ were not gladdened in making others glad, when could He have been joyful? And, nevertheless, He was not then gladdened; it was then that “he sighed.” He had gone aside from the multitude, so that there was, perhaps, no one to observe Him. His only companion was deaf, so that though He might have been seen to weep, He could not be heard to sigh. Therefore was the sigh quite, so to speak, between Himself and his Father in Heaven. It was as though He had taken advantage of the being alone and unnoticed, to gain a moment’s vent for that climbing sorrow which He was not willing to display before disciples who loved Him. And I seem to need nothing more to tell me how continually that heart was wrung, into which sin, which makes all our anguish, never had penetrated, than the simple recital that, before our blessed Saviour uttered the word which was to unstop the ear, and loosen the

tongue, "he sighed;" "looking up to heaven, *he sighed*, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened."

But wherefore did Christ sigh? was it only in evidence of the general depression of a spirit, wearied and overwrought by contact with wickedness? or came the sigh from a consciousness that the individual before him would be injured, rather than benefited, by the miracle about to be wrought? We cannot, of course, speak with any certainty in reply to these questions, forasmuch as the sacred historian gives no account of the feelings which then struggled in the mind of our Lord. Yet there are sundry interpretations which we may put upon the sigh; and if we cannot determine the true, we may, perhaps, draw from each some material of instruction.

We may be sure, in the first place, as to what did not cause the sigh; it argued no distrust of his heavenly Father, though it followed immediately on his looking up to his abode. The looking up to heaven was rather to direct the deaf man's attention to the source of healing power, than to obtain a supply of that power. There was the same lifting up of the eyes on the occasion of the raising of Lazarus; and then Christ stated the reason of this public appeal to the Father. "And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent

me." He was always sure, you observe, of the ability to work a miracle; but on certain occasions, He saw fit to preface the working by an appeal to God, in order to impress on spectators that his power was from above, and not, as had been blasphemously said, from beneath.

Hence, the sigh could have had no such connection with the looking up to heaven, as might argue mistrust of the Father whose will He had come down to accomplish. But, nevertheless, we may readily understand how, on the instant of working a miracle, a glance towards heaven might cause Christ to sigh. Wherefore had He descended from that bright abode if not to achieve its being opened to the lost race of man? And wherefore did He work miracles, if not to fix attention on Himself as the promised seed of the woman, who, through obedience and death, was to reinstate our lineage in the paradise, from which they had been exiled for sin? There was a sufficiency in the satisfaction which He was about to make, to remove the curse from every human being, and to place all the children of Adam in a more glorious position than their common parent had forfeited. But He knew too well that, in regard of multitudes, His endurances would be fruitless, fruitless, at least, in the sense of obtaining their salvation, though they cannot be in that of vindicating the attributes of God, and leaving the impenitent self-condemned at the judgment.

Therefore, it may be, did Christ sigh; and that,

too, immediately after looking up to heaven. I can read the sigh; it is full of most pathetic speech. "Yonder," the Redeemer seems to say, "is the home of my Father, of the cherubim and the seraphim. I would fain conduct to that home the race which I have made one with Myself, by so assuming their nature as to join it with the divine. I am about to work another miracle—to make, that is, another effort to induce the rebellious to take Me as their leader to yon glorious domain. But it will be fruitless; I foresee, but too certainly, that I shall still be 'despised and rejected of men.'" Then who can wonder that a sigh was interposed between the looking up to heaven, and the uttering the healing word? The eye of the Redeemer saw further than our own. It pierced the vault which bounds our vision, and beheld the radiant thrones which his agony would purchase for the children of men. And that men—men whom He loved with a love of which that agony alone gives the measure—should refuse these thrones, and thereby not only put from them happiness, but incur wretchedness without limit or end—must not this have been always a crushing thing to the Saviour? and more especially when, by glancing at the glories which might have been theirs, He had heightened his thought of their madness and misery? I am sure that were we striving to prevail on some wretched being to enter an asylum where he would not only be sheltered from imminent danger, but surrounded with all the material of hap-

piness, a look at that asylum, with its securities and comforts, would cause us to feel sorer than ever at heart, as we turned to make one more endeavour, likely to be useless as every preceding, to overcome the obduracy which must end in destruction. Therefore ought we readily to understand why the Redeemer, bent only on raising to glory a race, of which He foresaw that myriads would voluntarily sink down to fire and shame, gave token of a distressed and disquieted spirit, between looking towards heaven and working a miracle—as though the look had almost made Him reluctant for the work—“looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.”

But there may have been reasons, personal to the individual about to be healed, which caused Christ to preface the miracle with a sigh. We have spoken of the delight which it would yield to a benevolent man, if he could go into an asylum for the blind or the deaf, and communicate by a word the senses which were wanting in the objects around him. But did we not somewhat exaggerate, when we supposed that the pleasure would be quite unalloyed? It could hardly fail but that a suspicion would cross the mind of the individual, who had the power of giving sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, that, but too probably, there was some one in the group to whom it would be no blessing to obtain the deficient sense; who, if made to see, would but enslave himself to “the lust of the eye,” or who, if enabled to hear and

to speak, would but listen to evil, and employ his tongue in dishonouring his God. We know, too well, how largely does our every sense give inlet to temptation; so that, possibly, the want of one of these senses might often cause the soul to be assaulted with less vehemence from without. And it is easy to believe that a blind person, to whom sight were suddenly and miraculously given, would find an inundation, as it were, of new and strange desires, rushing on him through those magic organs which, like Satan on the mountain, show us "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory;" and that a deaf person, who should obtain instantaneously the hearing ear, and the speaking tongue, would be so bewildered by the new process of receiving and communicating thought, and so enabled to sin in new ways, that, if there were question only of the advantageousness of his condition in regard of another world, he had better have been confined to the scanty intelligence, which may be communicated in spite of defectiveness of organs, than have acquired abilities which may be so perilously abused.

Hence, it might not be wholly without some sentiment of apprehension and fear, that the benevolent man would pronounce the word which was to give sight to the blind, or speech to the dumb. It may be that, notwithstanding the flow of pleasurable feelings which would seem necessarily to attend the putting forth a power communicative of such benefit and blessing, he would sigh, with the Ephphatha on

his lips, as the thought occurred, that the senses, which He was about to impart, might only prove avenues of evil, and be desecrated to the service of sin. But with Christ, who could read the human heart, and foresee the human life, there could not have been doubtfulness as to the moral issue of the miracle. He must have unerringly known whether the individual before Him would be healed in soul as well as body; whether the wonder, of which he was the subject, would lead to faith in the prophet by whom it was wrought; whether the organs, which he was about to obtain, would be employed on the glorifying, or on the dishonouring, God. And perhaps He foreknew that the man, when healed, would be found amongst his persecutors, and oh, if so, how could He but sigh, sigh deeply and painfully, as He considered what sin had made the human heart, so hard that even miracles would not soften it, nor produce in it love towards a heavenly benefactor? Indeed, indeed, if there were such an exhibition of insensibility and ingratitude present to his mind, well might He sigh. Ah, men and brethren, if there can be sighs in heaven, He must still sigh as He "poureth his benefits" on every one amongst us, benefits which are too often received as mere things of course, benefits which, if not miraculous, are only not so because of their frequency, and which, alas, fail to bind us more devotedly to his service.

Or, if the Redeemer did not know that the man, whom He was about to heal, would join himself to

his enemies; if, on the contrary, He knew that he would be of the few who acknowledged Him as the Messiah; still He was too well aware, we may believe, of the dangerousness of the faculties which his word would bestow, to bestow them without a sigh. It was language, of which the man was hence-forwards to be master, the power of speaking and of being spoken with. And Christ could not give this but with a sigh. He knew that the power of speaking was especially the power of sinning; that no member was so difficult of control, and so liable to offend, as the tongue. There are many statements in the Bible, in regard to the importance of speech, the difficulty of regulating our words, and the danger of sinning with our lips. But I know of nothing more emphatic and expressive than this sigh of our Lord, when considered as indicating that what He bestowed, He bestowed with apprehension. As with the tears which Christ wept over Jerusalem, there is more in this sigh than in lengthened and heart-touching speech. The tongue unloosed with a sigh, the sigh of Him who had no sin to sigh for, is the most affecting of all testimonies that the tongue cannot be used without peril. It might do more than whole sermons on the guilt of idle words, to make us watchful in keeping "the door of our lips," were we only to bear in mind this sigh of the Redeemer. Oh, when tempted to the light jest, and, yet more, to the profane allusion—when inclined to employ on what is frivolous, or malicious, or impure, that high

faculty which God bestowed that we might make creation vocal with his praise ; then, if you cannot recollect any elaborate arguments which establish the special sinfulness of sins of the tongue, at least you might recal the simple narrative before us ; and it might tend to make and keep you fearful of mis-using and desecrating the power of speech, to remember that your Saviour could not impart this power, without betokening his consciousness how perilous it was : “ He sighed,” before He could bring Himself to say to the deaf and dumb man, “ Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.”

But we alluded, in an early part of our discourse, to the parabolic character which seems attached to the miracles of our Lord ; and, inclining to the belief that there is no miracle recorded in the New Testament, which does not serve to illustrate certain truths in the Christian dispensation, we are reluctant to leave the narrative before us without glancing at its typical instruction. And here we need hardly refer to the general fact, that the sicknesses of the soul are analogous to those of the body ; or that man, considered as an immortal being, requires healing processes, similar to those required by the lame, the deaf, and the blind. It can scarcely be called a figure of speech, when we describe the soul of a man, not yet renewed by the Spirit of God, as deficient in the powers of hearing, and seeing, and speaking. For the soul must be judged relatively to that higher world of which she was originally the citizen, and her

possession of faculties must be determined by testing her ability for the employments and enjoyments of the scene for which she was designed. But who can disguise from himself, that, in spiritual things, he is by nature as deficient in senses and organs, as he would be in earthly, if unable to see, to walk, to hear, to speak, to taste? The unrenewed soul has no eye for the glories of heaven, no feet for running the way of God's commandments, no ear for the sweet music of the Gospel, no voice for the praises of Christ, no relish for that bread which is "for the life of the world." And forasmuch as it is only through Christ, in his office of Mediator, that those influences are communicated which repair the decayed, or impart the destroyed faculties, we may justly regard our blessed Saviour, whilst working miracles on the body, as both teaching what was needful for the soul, and representing Himself as its appointed Physician. Hence, in Christ's unstopping the ears, and loosening the tongue, of the man that was brought to Him as He passed through Decapolis, every one may find the outlines of a symbolical lesson, as to the necessity for a Divine operation on our spiritual organs, ere the tidings of redemption can penetrate the soul, and the utterances of thanksgiving be heard in return.

But more may have been represented than this general fact. The man does not seem to have come of himself; and there is no evidence whatsoever that he had faith in Christ's power to heal. Indeed, as

we have endeavoured to show you, Christ took pains to fix attention on Himself as the worker of the miracle, as though to provide for faith following, if it did not precede the cure. The friends or relatives of the deaf and dumb man had faith in our Lord; this faith moved them to solicit a miracle, and was recompensed by its being wrought. And there is great encouragement in every such record of blessings procured through the intercession of friends. When I read of parents or relations leading the dumb to Jesus, and soliciting, in his name, what he could not solicit for himself, I gain assurance that parents or relations may bring children to the regenerating waters of baptism, and entreat on their behalf those gifts of the Spirit, which they are yet too young to entreat for themselves. I thank God for the record of miracles, in whose subjects there was faith; I thank Him still more for the record, when the faith was not found in the party that was healed, but in the party who conducted the diseased person to Christ. Oh, we may do much for those whom we love, whilst they are unable, or even whilst unwilling, to do any thing for themselves. We may bring them to Christ; we may entreat Christ to heal them; and such narratives as that which has been under review, warrant the hope, yea, even the expectation, that, if we ask in faith, the Redeemer will put forth his miraculous power.

But there is yet another significative fact which ought not to be overlooked. Our Lord led the

afflicted man aside from the multitude: did He not thereby tell them, who may be visited with any desire for spiritual cure, that it is not in the throng and bustle of the world that they may expect the renewal of their senses and powers? that they should separate themselves from distracting associations, seeing that it is in privacy and retirement that He is ordinarily pleased to work a moral miracle, and reproduce in the soul the lost image of God? He can heal you any where: He can unstop the ear and loosen the tongue whilst you are in the hurry of the crowd, or when you have sought the secrecy of the closet. But He loves the solitude: if you wish Him to work a miracle, prove that you wish it by going aside from the multitude, detaching yourselves from a world that "lieth in wickedness," breaking away from the company of his enemies—and then may you hope that He will meet you, and say unto you, with as much of power as of graciousness, "Ephphatha, that is, Be opened."

Will He say it with a sigh? Indeed, so great is the corruption of our nature, and so vast the disorganization around us, that the portion of a renewed man has often to be described in the words of St. Paul: "Without were fightings, within were fears." To convert, is to consign to a hard conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil. And Christ might sigh in speaking the word which gives spiritual health, remembering that He quickens men to the painful and perilous task of crucifying them-

selves, of offering themselves "a living sacrifice" unto God.

But if "heaviness may endure for a night," "joy cometh in the morning." The victory is sure with Christ for a leader, though the contest be severe. And if it be with a sigh that He pronounces the Ephphatha now—with a sigh, because to be a believer is to be persecuted and afflicted, at war with the world, at war with one's self—it shall be with a smile that He pronounces the Ephphatha hereafter, saying to the everlasting doors, "Be ye opened," that my people may enter my kingdom: "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest."

S E R M O N XI.

THE LATTER RAIN.

ZECHARIAH x. 1.

“Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain : so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field.”

It is not necessary that we inquire whether, as originally delivered, these words included spiritual blessings or were limited to temporal. The former are so frequently illustrated or shadowed out in Scripture by the latter, that we may safely treat the passage as a direction and a promise which have to do generally with prayer, and particularly with prayer for the communication of divine grace. In order, however, to the right understanding of the words, you are to observe that there were two seasons of the year at which rain was peculiarly needed and looked for in Judea. The one was in autumn, at the seed-time; the other was in the spring, when the corn

had to be brought to an ear and filled. The rain which fell at the one, is spoken of in Scripture as "the former rain;" that at the other, as "the latter;" and you find the two mentioned together when God would covenant to do great things for his land. Thus, in the Book of Deuteronomy, "If ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments, which I command you this day, I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain." Thus, again, in the prophecy of Jeremiah, "Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter in his season; he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of harvest." And once more, in Hosea, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth."

But "the latter rain" is often mentioned by itself, as though specially needed to the making available the labours of the husbandman. Thus you read in the Book of Job; "They waited for me as for the rain, and they opened their mouth wide as for the latter rain." And Solomon says, in the Book of Proverbs, "In the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain." Jeremiah, also, when describing the utter desolation brought by sin upon the land, exclaims; "Therefore the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain." The want of this latter rain would evidently

be peculiarly distressing; it might not do more towards causing famine than the want of the former; but, occurring at a time when the husbandman had fully done his part, and was expecting to reap the fruit of his labours, the horrors of dearth would be aggravated through the bitterness of disappointment; and there would, moreover, be less opportunity of providing sustenance from other quarters than if "the former rain" had failed, and thus long notice had been given of an insufficient harvest.

We may find, as we proceed with our discourse, that, in applying the text to spiritual things, great attention should be given to this mention of "the latter rain" rather than of "the former." At present, it is sufficient to have pointed out to you the times at which rain ordinarily fell in Judea: you will hence be aware of the importance of the blessing for which the people are directed to ask. We will now, without further preface, enter on the consideration of several great truths which appear derivable from the passage, when taken, in its largest sense, as a direction to prayer. We will not attempt, beforehand, to specify these truths, but rather leave them to open successively as we prosecute our examination. Let us only ask rain of the Lord, let us only entreat the aids and teachings of his Spirit, without which we may not hope to enter thoroughly into the meaning of Scripture, and it may, indeed, be for our profit that we study the direction, "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain;" and that we hearken to

the promise, "The Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field."

Now we shall begin with looking at the direction as having to do literally with the rain, with those showers which descend in due season to water the earth, "that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater." Alas, how difficult is it to keep God in mind as the great First Cause, when there is a mechanism of second causes through which He is pleased to conduct his operations and communicate blessings! If things ordinarily occur in a settled course, we speedily forget that this course is, after all, but the law which God is pleased to prescribe to Himself, to be followed only while it shall seem good to his infinite wisdom, and swerved from whensoever He shall think fit to suspend his own laws. If, for example, there be a time of the year at which rain is accustomed to fall, how readily do we expect rain at that time, just as though there were a certain set of causes, which, working always, and with unvarying regularity, would be sure, at corresponding seasons, to produce corresponding results. Men seem practically to have but little remembrance, that the main-spring of all the mechanism is in the hands of an invisible Creator; that it is not from what goes on in the hidden laboratories of what they call nature that season succeeds season, and shower and sunshine alternate with so much of beautiful and beneficent order, but that the whole arrangement is mo-

mentarily dependent on the will and energy of that supreme Being who "sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers." It is needful, we might almost say, that God should occasionally interrupt the ordinary course of things, that He should suspend the laws which He has been pleased to impress on the natural world, if only that He may keep Himself from being forgotten, and compel some recognition of his all-pervading influence from those who actually "live in Him, and move, and have their being."

But whilst there is this known proneness amongst us to the substituting second causes for the first, whilst we are confessedly so ready to look to the laws and the mechanism of nature, to do for us what can be done only by the direct and immediate agency of God, how important, how instructive, such an injunction as this; "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain!" You are to lay the emphasis on its being "the time of the latter rain," the season, that is, at which rain might be commonly expected; at which, year after year, it had been accustomed to fall, and at which, therefore, a boastful, or rather an infidel philosophy, might have argued that it would continue to fall, in obedience to fixed and immutable laws. If, from some cause or another, there should be want of rain at seasons when it was not usually wanted, when it was not the time for either "the former rain" or "the latter," perhaps this boastful philosophy itself would allow that there was

place or occasion for prayer. We do not, indeed, mean that the philosophy would necessarily assent to the possible usefulness of prayer in the supposed emergence: it is far more likely that it would entrench itself within its maxims as to the fixedness of nature's laws, and the consequent vanity of any expectation that these laws would be interfered with in order to the meeting our wishes or wants. But, at least, philosophy would here confess, that, if the rain fell at all, it would fall not through the working of mere second causes; and that, therefore, though prayer must be practically worthless, as pleading against a firmly-settled ordinance, it was still so far in place as that only the Being, to whom it was addressed, had power to give rain at so unwonted a time. If, however, it be actually "the time of the latter rain," then will a prayer for rain appear to this philosophy utterly unreasonable or preposterous, as if we were not content to leave natural causes to work out their invariable effects; or as if we wanted to make a parade of the power and efficacy of prayer, and therefore directed it to a boon which we knew that we should receive, whether we asked it or not.

But God, on the contrary, says; "Ask ye rain in the time of the latter rain." Oh, what a lesson to us that we reckon not, so to speak, on the seasons; that we presume not to expect any good merely because the time is come round at which, in the ordinary course of his dealings, God has been used to

bestow that good. A blessing may have been long and regularly communicated; but we are not to count on the regularity of the communication, as though it proved some immutable law, which must continue to work out the accustomed result: it may be "the time of the latter rain;" the experience of a lengthened course of years may warrant the expectation of rain; and the clouds on the firmament may seem big with the usual supply—but God has yet to issue his command; God has yet to unseal the fountain; and therefore there is still place for prayer, there is still need for prayer: it is "the time of the latter rain," but, on that very account, it is the time also for the asking of rain. To ask it at another time might be asking a miracle, a departure from God's ordinary course, and we cannot be said to have warrant for that. But to ask it at this time, is to ask what we know is according to God's will; and "this," saith St. John, "is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us."

Beware, then, of taking for granted that mercies will continue to descend in the order, and at the times, which may have long been observed: there is no such likely way of stopping the supply, as the failing to recognize that the fountain is with God. God describes Himself as "a jealous God;" and it must move Him to jealousy, whensoever, in any degree, we substitute his instruments for Himself, or look to the channel as if it were the spring. The long con-

tinuance of a mercy at a particular season may indeed be said to involve a kind of promise—for God has so constituted us that we naturally expect what we have often experienced; and a Divine promise is not only that which is registered in the Divine word, but that also which is conveyed through the moral constitution received at God's hands. But let it be remembered that a Divine promise, so far from proving it unnecessary that we ask, should itself be our great reason for asking. God's promises are the warrants for man's prayers. What God has promised, may be asked for in the perfect confidence "that it is according to his will;" and since the promises are conditional, their fulfilment being made dependent on our seeking, or inquiring for, the covenanted blessings, we may not only be encouraged in our prayers by God's promises, but ought in no degree to reckon on promises, except as we make them foundations for prayers. God may be said to have promised rain "in the time of the latter rain:" but just because it is a time at which rain has been promised, therefore is it a time at which prayer should be made.

And so with every mercy. The recurrence of the time at which God has been used to bestow it, should not make you expect to receive it again without asking, but should make you ask in the full confidence of receiving. The Sabbath, for example, is a "time of the latter rain:" rain is then used to fall—God's Spirit descends in gracious showers for the refreshment of the Church. The time of the adminis-

tration of Christian ordinances is a "time of the latter rain," God commonly using the preaching of his word and the dispensing of his sacraments, to the conveyance of grace to his waiting people. But because these are times "of the latter rain," shall they not be also times for the praying for rain? Oh, never ought your prayers to be so fervent or importunate. You are, as it were, on the top of Carmel; you see the cloud rising out of the sea; but you must not take for granted that there will be "abundance of rain:" God may command the cloud back into the sea, yea, He may be expected to do this, if you do not wrestle with Him in prayer. Therefore, on the Sabbath morn, because it is the Sabbath morn, the morning of grace, redouble your prayers for grace; on sacramental opportunities, because they are God's chosen occasions of imparting his Spirit, cry more earnestly than ever for that Spirit. Think not that the favourableness of the season can make the necessity for prayer less, whereas it does but make the encouragement to prayer greater. Substitute not the means of grace for grace, as though, when the former were vouchsafed, the latter would be sure to follow; ah, there may be the clouds and not the showers; and, therefore, remember ye the precept of our text, and "ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain."

Now we have thus endeavoured to show you that the circumstance of its being "a time of rain"—whether the natural rain or the spiritual—so far

from furnishing a reason why we should not ask for rain, is itself the great argument for our asking; inasmuch as it proves that we have God's promise on our side, and the promise of God is always the warrant, but never the substitute for the prayer of man. But all that has preceded would have been equally appropriate, had "the former rain," not "the latter," been specified in the text: we have simply spoken of the time as being "a time of rain," a time at which it is God's ordinary course to communicate a blessing; and we have warned you against expecting that blessing, without asking for it; we have endeavoured to prove to you, that your reason for expecting should be your reason also for asking.

Let us not, however, pass without comment the mention of "the latter rain:" when the reference of the prophet is supposed to be to spiritual rain, there are special truths to be gathered from his speaking of "the latter rain" rather than of "the former." We have explained to you that "the latter rain" was that which fell in the spring, and which was instrumental to the bringing the corn into the ear, and filling it; so that, if this rain failed, the husbandman would be disappointed of his harvest, notwithstanding all his previous industry, skill, and anxiety. He was indeed dependent also on "the former rain," that which fell at the seed-time; for the grain would not germinate, and send up the tender shoot, unless the ground were watered by the fertilizing showers. But there would be a yet more

bitter disappointment, for there would be the utter loss of much labour, the fruitless expenditure of much effort and hope, if "the latter rain" were withheld; and, consequently, there was even greater reason for his asking rain in "the time of the latter rain" than in that of "the former:" if "the former rain" were withheld, he might make some other use of his capital and enterprise; but if "the latter," his disaster scarce admitted of repair.

Now without endeavouring to trace too narrowly the parallel to this in spiritual things, we may safely say that there is something very affecting and admonitory in the mention of "the latter rain." It is the rain needed for filling the ear, and fitting it for the sickle. Take it metaphorically, and it is the grace needed for ripening the believer, and fitting him for heaven. The former rain may be considered that which fell upon him at his baptism, or, perhaps more accurately, at his conversion, when he set himself, according to the directions of the prophet, to "break up his fallow ground, and sow to himself in righteousness." And he has been enabled, through the continued influences of the Spirit of God, to bring forth "first the blade, and then the ear," advancing in the Christian life, and adorning the doctrine of the Saviour. But, oh, there is now a danger of his falling into security, of his reckoning too confidently on the harvest, of his concluding that God will certainly complete a work so auspiciously begun, so happily carried on, and that he himself can have

nothing to do but leave God to “perfect that which concerneth” him. True, indeed, it is God alone who can complete what God alone commenced; and true also it is, that God is not willing to leave his work unfinished. But He may withhold “the latter rain,” after having given “the former,” if He see the husbandman presuming on a promise, in place of persevering in prayer. He does not leave the husbandman to ripen the corn, just as He did not require of him to make the seed shoot; for there is not a single stage in the great process of spiritual renewal, at which it is ought else but God’s grace, which, acting on the heart, brings out features of the image which sin fearfully defaced. But whilst it is not with the husbandman, but with God, to ripen the corn, God may make his ripening it depend on the exercise of faith, and the importunity of prayer. He may give “the latter rain,” if the husbandman, conscious of his dependence upon God for the harvest, continue meekly to supplicate the necessary showers: He may withhold that rain, if the husbandman, calculating on the ordinary course of his dealings, grow remiss in petitioning, and give up his fields to the presumed certainties of the season.

There is no point in the life of a Christian, at which he can do without the supply of God’s grace; none at which he can expect the supply, if he be not cultivating the spirit and habit of prayer. It is not the mere circumstance of his having long followed the narrow path of life, which can be taken in proof

that he will follow it to the end. If he have hitherto walked with God, it has been through his having sought and obtained such communications of the Divine Spirit, as have enabled him to maintain his separation from a world lying in wickedness. And if he is to persevere in walking with God, it must be through perseverance in these acts of faith and of prayer: if he think himself sure to go on, because he supposes that he has acquired a certain velocity which will suffice, without further effort, to carry him to the end, alas, he shows only that, even in advancing, he has failed to observe by what his progress was caused. That progress can never be such that he may dispense with the assistance, without which he could not have made a successful beginning. There was "the former rain," else there could not have been even the green blade; there must be also "the latter rain," else will he "bring no fruit to perfection." But it is the same thing, it is rain, which is needed at both times, or for both ends: there is no change in the instrumentality; he could not have begun without Divine grace, and Divine grace alone can give completeness to the work.

This is among the simplest, the most elementary of doctrines; and yet it is one of which the believer requires to be often and earnestly reminded. When a man begins in religion, his conviction of sin, and his sense of danger, conspire to the urging him to cry unto God for assistance and guidance. But when he has made some way, there is fear of his forgetting

the agency to which alone he is indebted for progress. Or, if he do not forget the agency, he comes to expect it as a matter of course—as the husbandman the rain at the accustomed seasons—and he grows more remiss in prayer for God's Spirit, even whilst relying on the aids of that Spirit. Beware of this, ye who are growing old in a Christian profession. Ye are not secure of having more of God's Spirit, merely because ye have already had much. Ye must not slacken in prayer for that Spirit, because it is only "the latter rain" which is now needed, and you may think that God will be sure to ripen what He has so long been cultivating. Rather think with yourselves, how grievous would it be that the harvest should be one of shame, when the seed-time has been one of promise! How sad to miss "the latter rain," after having had "the former," and thus lose the labour of years, when on the point, it may be, of gathering in the sheaves! Oh, pray the more earnestly, strive the more intensely, the nearer you stand to the termination of your course. I would say to the believer, even on his death-bed, a good hope, a scriptural hope, is that which expresses itself in cries for God's grace. Till you are with God in heaven, no language can be so appropriate as that which entreats that God would be with you on earth. It is indeed "the time of the latter rain;" and those dense clouds, which are the heraldry of dissolution, are commonly charged with showers of consolation; for God may be expected to be doubly

with his people, as they pass "through the valley of the shadow of death." But God will still be "enquired of" for what He stands ready to bestow; and the best confidence for the dying, as the best for the living, is confidence in prayer as laying hold on a promise. Be it then "the time of the latter rain"—"the latter rain," because but few more showers can be needed; "the time" of that rain, because, in his ordinary course, God is then wont to give largely of his grace—on neither account slacken in prayer; rather, on both accounts, be fervent in prayer. There is the better reason for expecting an answer to prayer, but none for supposing that prayer is no longer needed: he alone can safely have done with offering prayer for grace, who has begun the anthem of praise in glory; and, therefore, "Be not weary in well-doing," but "ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain."

But now let us consider whether "the time of the latter rain" may not be a season in the history of the Church, and whether, when so understood, there is not a great and neglected duty enjoined by the text. It is certainly to be gathered from the tenor of Scripture, that, as "the time of the end" approaches, that time on which prophecy has thrown its most emphatic descriptions, there will be a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Even the prediction of Joel, which St. Peter quotes as having had reference to the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, would seem to be still waiting an ampler ac-

complishment; for the prophet associates the promised gift of the Spirit with the coming of "the great and terrible day of the Lord," and thus prepares us for not expecting that gift in all its largeness, until the time shall be at hand when Christ is to reappear, and set up visibly his throne on the wreck of all earthly dominion. But, at all events, there is no dispute that the prophecy refers generally to the Christian dispensation, and that it assigns, as one of the privileges of that dispensation, a larger measure of spiritual influence. When St. Peter adduces the prediction as that which was to "come to pass in the last days," he undoubtedly applies it to the days in which we live, as well as to those in which he spake: these must be amongst "the last days," whatever the view taken of the prophetic chronology; and therefore are they days to which the great promise belongs, "I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh."

Hence the present time is "the time of the latter rain:" the time of "the former rain" was that of earlier and preparatory dispensations, when the world was being made ready for a fuller revelation; but now that the Holy Ghost has entered specially on the office of guide and instructor to the Church, it is the time of "the latter rain." There is to be no higher evidence of the truth of Christianity, no opening of more direct intercourse between earth and heaven: we are in the enjoyment of those final advantages for securing happiness beyond the grave,

which were longed for, but in vain, by them on whom only "the former rain" fell; many prophets and kings having desired to see the things which we see, and not having seen them, and to hear the things which we hear, and not having heard them. But though it is thus "the time of the latter rain," because, generally, that time must include the whole Christian dispensation, and because perhaps, in a stricter sense, it must comprehend such days as our own, which are not without signs of the second coming of Christ, yet it does not follow that "the latter rain" will fall; as though the heavens must be opened, merely because it is the season for the showers. Our blessed Saviour, when delivering counsels which were undoubtedly to serve for the instruction of the Church to "the time of the end," spake thus in regard of the Spirit: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." The dispensation, which He was introducing, was to be emphatically the dispensation of the Spirit; the dispensation throughout which the Spirit was to "abide" as "a Comforter" with the Church; and yet, you see, the asking for that Spirit is still made the condition on which it should be given.

It is the same as with prophecies of the restoration of Israel, and with promises of gladness and peace to the long exiled people. Nowhere do you find these prophecies and promises more copiously uttered than

in the thirty-sixth chapter of the book of Ezekiel—but then, observe how this chapter concludes, “Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.” God had just declared that He would do this and that thing; He had made no conditions, but spoken as of a fixed, irreversible, purpose; and nevertheless, as if to remind us of a condition, which is always involved, if not always expressed, where a Divine promise is passed, He adds that He must yet be “inquired of by the house of Israel,” in order to his accomplishing what He had announced.

Thus also with regard to the progress of Messial's kingdom, the march of Christianity towards universal dominion. God hath promised great things. He hath not intended that the vast blessings of redemption should, even in appearance, remain limited to certain sections of the family of man. Though, for wise ends, He hath permitted a long struggle between darkness and light, He has decreed the termination of that struggle, having given assurance of a time when all shall know Him “from the least unto the greatest,” when “the kingdoms of the world” shall become “the kingdoms of the Lord and his Christ.” But He will yet be “inquired of” for these things, to do them for us. He requires of us that we exert ourselves for the spread of Christianity; and He requires that we intreat of Him the accomplishment of his gracious declarations. Have we not failed in both particulars? and perhaps even more egregiously

in the latter than in the former? Without pausing to examine what proportion our efforts have borne to our means, whether we have, in any due measure, employed our resources on the arduous, but glorious, work of making Christ known to the heathen, let us inquire as to the frequency and intenseness of our prayers for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; and shall we not find but too much cause to confess that we have verily been remiss in a duty, which is second to none in urgency, and to none in hopefulness? The prosperity of the church at home, the progress of our holy religion abroad, these are not so much dependent on any external machinery, as on the quickening, renewing, and strengthening influences of the Holy Ghost. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

And these influences of the Holy Ghost are promised in answer to prayer. But do we often make them the subject of prayer? Do we in our closets, do we in our families, cry much unto God that He would fulfil his promises in the bestowment of his Spirit? I do believe, without indulging in exaggerated speech, that we have in our possession the means of overthrowing the idolatries of the world, and erecting the Sanctuary of God on the wreck of the temples of heathenism. But I do not believe this, because of the magnificent, the unequalled, resources which God, in his providence, has given into our keeping. I do not believe this, because it may almost be said of our colonies, that they are planted

on every land, and of our fleets, that they cover every sea. Perish the boastful computations which, after drawing out our political and commercial ascendancy, would infer that we must be competent to the covering the earth with the knowledge of Christ. But I believe this, because I believe in the power of the Holy Ghost to renew the face of the world, and in the power of prayer to obtain the operations of that Divine agent. I believe this, because I believe that there is a goodly company in our land who pray the prayer of faith, and who have, therefore, only to be diligent in asking "of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain," to insure the descent of showers which shall cause the waste places to rejoice, and "blossom as the rose." But if the faithful pray not for the rain, it will be nothing, as heretofore it has done little towards evangelizing the globe, that we have national resources for the propagation of truth, such as were never yet committed to any people under heaven. Some inconsiderable province, some state undistinguished in the scale of nations, unendowed, to all appearance, with means for high enterprise, may yet take the lead in the honoured work of subduing the kingdoms to the Lord our Redeemer, because it will take the lead in the undoubted duty of beseeching of God to pour out his Spirit. Let us remember and be warned by this. Let each consider, and examine, whether he may not have verily been guilty herein, perhaps never praying, or praying but listlessly and formally, for the promised descent of

the Holy Ghost. Our lot is cast in the last days, in "the time of the latter rain." We are not without our signs, in the march of events, in the aspect of society, in the accomplishment of prophecy, that "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." Now then is the time for earnest, united, importunate prayer for the Spirit of God. Wonders may be accomplished; a nation may be "born in a day;" "the ends of the earth may see the salvation of the Lord:" O "ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest;" "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain;" and "the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give showers of rain, to every one grass in the field."

There is something very beautiful in the terms of this promise; but we have time only for a hasty notice. The "bright clouds," or, as the marginal reading has it, "lightnings," are the harbingers, or forerunners, of the rain; and God, you see, declares that He will make these, before He sends the showers. Thus He exercises faith; He does not immediately answer the prayer, but requires his people still to "wait" on Him; He will "make bright clouds" for their encouragement, but they must persevere in supplication if they would have showers for their refreshment. Ay, and to them that "wait upon the Lord," there may be clouds, but are they not "bright clouds?" the stripes of light are painted on their darkness; the murkiest cloud which can rise on the firmament of the believer has a gilded side: "the

Sun of righteousness" shines on it; and so truly is the time of tears the time also of "the latter rain," that, if these "bright clouds" betoken a season of affliction, they are quickly followed by communications of grace. God may bring the cloud over his people, and, as Elihu saith, "Men see not the bright light which is in the clouds;" but if the world see it not, the believer may; and God brings the cloud, that its brightness being acknowledged, in and through the acknowledgment of his doing all things well, He may then send "a gracious rain on his inheritance, and refresh it when it is weary."

And the showers which God sends are for the clothing with richer verdure his garden, which is the Church. "To every one grass in the field." We may receive the Spirit; but we do but grieve, we do but quench it, if its influence be not visible on our walk and conversation. If there be not more and brighter grass in the field, we deceive ourselves if we think that there can be more of saving grace in the heart.

But how large is the promise—"To every one grass in the field." Here is evidence that "the time of the latter rain" is especially that "time of the end," when falsehood is at length to give way before truth, and the trials of Christianity are to issue in its triumph. "To every one grass in the field,"—all shall know the Lord, all shall be righteous. Blessed and glorious prospect! There may be reason for thinking that the regenerated earth shall be enamel-

led with the loveliness which sparkled in paradise, ere the dark blight of sin dimmed the lustre; but, at the least, here is a moral verdure of surpassing richness, and I ask not the visions of a material luxuriance, when we have thus the assurance of an universal righteousness. O Spirit of the living God, the parched and stricken earth waits Thy descent: come down, in answer to our prayers, that the valleys and mountains may no longer lie waste.

S E R M O N X I I .

THE LOWLY ERRAND.

MATT. XXI. 3.

“ And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them, and straightway he will send them.”

YOU will all probably remember the portion of our Lord's history with which these words are connected. Christ was about to make his last entry into Jerusalem, where He was to seal his doctrine with his death, and offer Himself in sacrifice for the sins of the world. There was a prophecy which had distinctly announced that the Messiah should enter the city “ riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.” That this prophecy might not be unfulfilled, our Lord determined to make his approach to Jerusalem in the manner which Zechariah had indicated.

In order to this, we read that when they “ were come to Bethphage, unto the Mount of Olives, then

sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me." The remainder of the direction is contained in our text. The thing enjoined on the disciples had all the appearance of an act of robbery; and it might well be expected that they would encounter opposition. But Christ provided against this, telling them what answer to make if any one questioned their right to the ass and the colt, and assuring them that this answer would save them from molestation. And so it came to pass. The disciples went as they had been directed; the ass and colt were found at the precise spot which had been described; the owners interfered to prevent what seemed like the seizing of their property; but the simple words with which Christ had furnished his messengers removed all objections, and the ass and colt were allowed to depart.

This is one of those occurrences to which we may easily fail to attach due importance, and which contain instruction not to be detected by a cursory glance. The more prominent events in the history of Jesus, the great things which befel Him, and the wonderful which He wrought, attract and fix attention; and we perhaps labour to extract from them the lessons with which they are fraught. But minute things we may comparatively overlook, and so lose much which is calculated to strengthen faith or regulate practice. Possibly, there is often as much to admire

and imitate, where there is little of show in the outward action and duty, as where the thing done overwhelms us by its magnificence, or that enjoined by its arduousness. Every one stands in amazement by the grave of Lazarus, and looks with awe on the Redeemer as, with a single word, He reanimates the dead. But few may pause to acknowledge equal tokens of superhuman ability, as Christ sends Peter to find a piece of money in the mouth of a fish, or two of his disciples to bring an ass from the neighbouring village. Every one admits the greatness of the obedience when Levi abandons the receipt of custom, and the difficulty of the injunction, when the young man is bidden to sell the whole of his possessions. But few, comparatively, may observe how Christian obedience was taxed, when Apostles were sent on such an errand as is now to be reviewed, or when the owners of the ass and the colt surrendered them on being told that they were needed by Christ. Let us, then, devote a discourse to the considering an incident which is less likely than many to attract by its evident wonderfulness; but which may be found, on inquiry, to attest most decisively the mission of Christ, and to furnish lessons of the first moment to ourselves.

Now the Evangelist, so soon as he has related how Jesus sent his disciples on the errand in question, remarks; "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet," and then proceeds to quote the words of Zechariah. Here the representation undoubtedly is, that Jesus sent

for the ass and the colt on purpose that He might accomplish an ancient prediction, which, by universal consent, had respect to the Messiah. An impostor would have done the same. Had a deceiver arisen, professing to be the Christ, he would of course have endeavoured to establish a correspondence between himself and the deliverer whom seers had beheld in their visions¹. Wheresoever the thing predicted were such that its seeming accomplishment might be contrived, he would naturally have set himself to the bringing round what should pass for fulfilment. And certainly the prophecy of Zechariah is one which a false Christ might have managed to accomplish. There was nothing easier than to have arranged for entering Jerusalem in the manner indicated by the prophet: any one who pretended to be the Christ, and who knew that the riding into the city on an ass was one appointed sign of the Christ, could have taken care that this sign at least should be his, whatever the particulars in which he might fail to give proof. We do not, then, bring Christ's entering Jerusalem in the manner foretold by Zechariah, as any convincing evidence of the truth of his pretensions: there was, indeed, the accomplishment of a prophecy, but it was a prophecy of which, on the showing of the Evangelist, Jesus Himself arranged the accomplishment, and which an impostor might, without difficulty, have equally fulfilled. It was necessary that

¹ See Sermon VIII.

the thing predicted should come to pass, otherwise, as you must all see, there would have been a flaw in the credentials of our Lord: for as the riding on the ass into Jerusalem had been distinctly foretold, He could not have been the Christ had He not thus entered the city. Hence, the accomplishment of the prophecy in question prevented an objection rather than furnished a proof: it prevented an objection, because the not having ridden into Jerusalem might have been urged in evidence that Jesus could not be the Christ; but it furnished no proof, because a deceiver might have contrived to make his entry as the prophet had announced.

But if we may not dwell on the incident before us as proving Christ divine through the witness of fulfilled prophecy, let us consider whether there be not the witness of more than human prescience and power. And here, again, we must proceed with caution and limitation. For just as there may be contrivance to produce the apparent accomplishment of prophecy, there may be to effect the apparent display of supernatural attributes. There was—at least there may have been, a display of superhuman knowledge and power. Christ told his disciples, with the greatest minuteness, where they should find the animals, and what words would induce the owners to allow their being taken. If you read the accounts in the several Evangelists, you will perceive that He went into the nicest particulars. There was to be an ass tied, and a colt with her. The colt was to be one on

which never man had sat. The place was to be immediately on entering the village, and where two ways met. The owners were to make objection, but to withdraw that objection on being told, "The Lord hath need of them." Now if this were not miracle, the owners having been supernaturally acted on, was it not prophecy? Christ predicted certain occurrences, and when all came to pass as He had said, was there not proof of his being gifted with more than human foresight? Yes; if the whole were not contrived and prearranged. And it might have been. What easier than for an impostor and his confederates to have managed the whole affair? The impostor might have agreed with his confederates, that they should be in waiting at a certain place with certain animals, and that, on receiving a certain message, they should surrender those animals. And thus might he have acquired for himself the reputation of a prophet, though there would have been nothing in the whole transaction but trick and collusion.

Let us consider, however, whether the supposition of trick and collusion can be, in any measure, sustained under the circumstances of the case. Had the owners of the ass been confederate with Christ, they must have been of the number of his followers or adherents. But then they would, almost necessarily, have been known to the disciples whom Jesus sent, and thus the whole deception would have been instantly exposed. For you are to observe, that, if any

were to be convinced or persuaded by the prescience displayed, it must have been the disciples ; no others, so far as we know, were acquainted with what we may call Christ's prediction. But no effect could have been wrought on the disciples, had not the owners of the ass been strangers to Jesus ; and, if strangers, they could not have been leagued with Him to effect a deceit.

Whilst, therefore, we readily allow that there was that in the things predicted and performed which might have given place for imposture, we contend that the circumstances exclude the supposition of imposture, and leave room for nothing but belief that Christ really prophesied, and that events proved his prophecy truth. And, having satisfied ourselves that there could not have been deception or collusion, we may admire the prescience and power displayed, and derive from them fresh witness to the dignity of our Lord. We have pointed out to you how the prophecy descended into the minutest particulars, and it is this accuracy of detail which makes prophecy wonderful. A great occurrence may often be conjectured through human sagacity ; a keen observer will mark the shadows thrown by coming events, and give notices of those events, which time shall accurately verify. But the difficulty is to go into trifles, to foreknow things trifling in themselves, or their trifling accidents and accompaniments. I am really more struck at the foreknowledge of Christ, when sending his disciples for the ass and the colt, than when

announcing the desolations which should come upon Jerusalem. Circumstanced as the Jews were in regard of the Romans, subjected to their empire but galled by the yoke, a farsighted politician might have conjectured the arrival of a time when rebellion would make the eagle swoop down to the slaughter. But that an ass and her foal should be found, at a certain moment, on a certain spot—that the owners would allow them to be taken away on the utterance of certain words, which even a thief might have used—indeed, there may not be as much majesty in such a prophecy, as when the theme is a conqueror's march or an empire's fall, but I know not whether there be not more marvel, if you judge by the room given for a shrewd guess or a sagacious surmise.

There was miracle, moreover, as well as prophecy. I can count it nothing less than a miracle wrought upon mind, that men, in all probability poor men, were willing to give up their property at the bidding of strangers, and with no pledge for its return. You can hardly explain this but on the supposition of a superhuman influence; so that Christ, who had before showed his power over matter at a distance, by healing the centurion's son without going to his house, now showed his power over mind at a distance, by constraining men to act without bringing them to hear. Hence, we can declare the incident before us a singular exhibition of the power of prophecy and the power of miracle; an exhibition, moreover, as appropriate as it was striking. We can

suppose that our Redeemer, knowing the bitter trials to which his disciples were about to be exposed, desired to give them some proof of his superhuman endowments, which might encourage them to rely on his protection, when He should no longer be visibly amongst them. What shall be the proof? shall He control the tumultuous elements? shall He summon legions of angels? shall He shake Jerusalem with the earthquake? shall He divide the Jordan? Nay, it was not by any stupendous demonstration that the timid disciples were likely to be assured. They rather required to be taught that the knowledge and power of their Master extended to mean and inconsiderable things; for hence they would learn, that, though poor and despised, they should not be overlooked but engage his protection and care. They wanted evidence that his presence was not needful in order to his guardianship, but that He could act on their enemies as well when at a distance as when near. And the more magnificent miracle might not have certified them on the points on which they thus needed assurance. But this was done by an exhibition of prescience in regard to an animal and of power over its owner. He who could be taking cognisance of the place of an ass and her foal, would not fail to observe the position of the poor fishermen, his followers; He who could influence those who saw Him not to surrender their property, would put forth control over persecutors when He had returned to the heavens.

And therefore do we call upon you to admire the transaction under review, not only because it displayed superhuman knowledge and power, but displayed them in the manner best adapted to the circumstances of those for whose benefit it took place. Our blessed Saviour repeated the kind of display, as though feeling its special suitableness to his disciples, when He indicated the place for eating the passover, by the meeting a man "bearing a pitcher of water." The ass and the colt might have been procured without all this laboured and circuitous process. But Jesus, contemplating the fulfilment of an ancient prediction, would have it fulfilled through such means as should strengthen the faith of the dejected followers, who were soon to be separated from Him. He might in a moment, by an act of creative power, have produced the creatures of which He stood in need. Or He might have summoned the chief priests and scribes, and constrained them, however much against their will, to provide for his triumphant, yet humiliating, entry. And in such methods there might have been more that was calculated to dazzle and amaze. But if the despised were to be taught that meanness could not hide from his notice, and the deserted that distance could not withdraw from his protection, then, indeed, nothing could have been more appropriate than the transaction before us. It might have been a loftier bidding, Go ye to the wilderness and command hither the untamed thing which "scorneth the mul-

titude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver;" or, "Go ye to the Sanhedrim, and demand of the haughty assembly that they furnish my humble equipage, and so enable me to fulfil prophecies which shall witness against them;" but there was immeasurably more of regard for the wants of his disciples, more of tender consideration, more of gracious forethought, in the directions before us, "Go ye into the village: ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and say, The Lord hath need of them."

Now, up to this point we have examined the transaction with reference to our Saviour, considering only the prescience and power displayed, together with the wisdom and goodness that may be traced in the mode of display. Let us now turn to the conduct of the disciples, and see whether there be not much to deserve our imitation.

It does not appear that there was any hesitation as to the obeying a command which might naturally have been heard with some measure of repugnance. The disciples were to go on what might have passed for a wild errand. Was it likely that they should find the ass and the colt just where Christ said? If they did, how were they to obtain possession? what was it but robbery to attempt to remove them without the knowledge of the owners? and if the owners should be standing by, what could be expected from them but insult and violence? what probability was

there that they would be influenced by such words as Christ directed to be used? It can hardly be questioned that most of us would have been ready with these doubts and objections. We invent reasons enough for hesitating, or refusing, to obey, when there is not half so much of plausible excuse for avoiding a prescribed path of duty. How difficult do we find it to take God at his word, to show our faith in a promise by fulfilling its condition! We will not go to the place where the two ways meet, on the simple assurance that we shall there find what we seek; we want some more sensible evidence as to the animals being there, before we adventure on what may only disappoint. And if we are to be exposed to misconstruction or opprobrium, if the thing which we are called upon to do be likely to bring reproach, or give occasion for calumny, what a shrinking is there! what a reluctance! The positive command of Christ would hardly suffice, if it required what an ill-natured world might liken to robbery. Not that, in obeying the Divine law, we shall ever give just cause for opprobrious reflection; the command might be to take the ass and the foal, but God would provide that the taking them should not bring disgrace upon religion. But this it is for which we cannot trust Him; we doubt whether there will be any such power in the words, "The Lord hath need of them," as will secure us from violence or malice; and therefore, we either decline the duty

altogether, or enter on it with a hesitation, and want of faith, which may themselves produce the results of which we are in dread.

It was not thus with the first disciples; and we should do well to endeavour to imitate their obedience. It seems, with them, to have been enough that the duty was clear, as enjoined by a plain command of their Master; and immediately they “conferred not with flesh and blood,” hearkened not to carnal suggestions, but acted as men who knew that compliance was their part, and the removal of difficulties God’s. Thus should it be with us; we should have but one object, that of satisfying ourselves, from the prayerful study of Scripture, whether this action be right, or that action wrong; when the decision is reached, there should be no hesitation in regard either of consequences or means; what God has made it incumbent on us to do, He will enable us to perform; what He requires us to give up, He will not suffer us to want. If He send us to the place where the two ways meet, it shall be only our faithlessness which can prevent our there finding what we seek; and if his bidding seem to expose us to the being called robbers, He will see his will so executed as to silence the adversary.

And then it is well worthy of remark that it looked like an ignoble errand on which the disciples were dispatched. When sent to preach the Gospel in the cities of Judæa, there was something illustrious in the commission; we can imagine them going forth, sus-

tained in part by the lofty consciousness of being messengers from heaven, charged with tidings of unrivalled importance. But to be sent to a village in quest of an ass and her foal; what an indignity, it might almost have been said, for men on whom had been bestowed supernatural powers, who had been entrusted, not only with the preaching of the gospel, but with the ability to work wonders in proof of its truth. Probably they were not aware of Christ's reasons for sending them on such an errand; it might have thrown a sort of splendour about the commission, had they known that ancient prophecy was to be thereby accomplished. But it was not until after his resurrection that Christ expounded unto his disciples "in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." It may, therefore, have been that they whom He dispatched, had no idea whatsoever of being instrumental to fulfilling a famous prediction, but went about the business in ignorance of all that might have redeemed it from apparent ignobleness. The opinion of many is, that the two disciples were Peter and John, men who had accompanied the Redeemer to Tabor, and witnessed the wondrous scene of his transfiguration. What a change was here! to have been selected, at one time, to go to meet Moses and Elias, emerging in glory from the invisible world; and at another, to go into a village, and find an ass and her foal for their Master. But it was for their Master; and this sufficed. It mattered nothing to them on what they were

employed, provided only it was Christ by whom they were employed. That, they felt, could not be degrading which He commanded; nor that unimportant by which He might be served. Oh for something of the like spirit amongst ourselves—a readiness to fill the lower offices as well as the chief, a disposition to count it honour enough to be useful to Christ, in whatever capacity! How many are there who can be active and earnest in what is great and imposing, and take the lead in enterprises for the spread of the gospel, who, nevertheless, have no taste for humbler duties, duties to be discharged in the hovel of poverty, and at the bed-side of sickness! This is willingness to be the disciple, whilst Judea has to be traversed, with all the insignia of an ambassador from God, and unwillingness, when the ass and the colt are to be fetched from the village. How many can hearken gladly to religion, whilst discourse turns only on lofty things, on communings with Deity, on manifestations of heaven, who yet feel impatience, and even disgust, when there is mention of a cross to be borne, and reproach to be braved. And what is this but readiness to follow Christ to the mount, when He is about to assume glorious apparel, and shine forth in the majesty which is essentially his own, but refusal to act in his service when He requires the mean animal, which is likely to procure him the scorn of the proud?

Indeed it is a prime truth, but one which we are all slow to learn, that there is no employment which

is not ennobled through being employment for Christ, and that it is not genuine Christianity which selects what it likes, and leaves what it dislikes. If we have the love of Christ in our hearts, it will be our dominant desire to promote his cause, and perform his will ; and though the dominance of this desire may not prevent our feeling that we should prefer one sphere of labour to another, or enter with greater alacrity on this course than on that, it will certainly produce readiness for every variety of duty, for fetching the colt on which Christ may ride, as well as for rearing the temple in which He may dwell. And we set before you the example of the Apostles in a particular, in which, possibly, it is often overlooked. We show you how, without the least hesitation, these holy men set themselves to the obeying a command, against which they might have offered very plausible objections, objections drawn not only from the little likelihood of success, but from the almost certain exposure to reproach and disgrace. We show you also how it was required of them to come down, so to speak, from their loftier occupation, and perform what might be called a menial service ; and with what alacrity they complied ; the very men to whom spirits were subject, and who had been ordained to wage God's war with the powers of darkness, being directed, and being willing, to go on an errand to which the meanest were equal. The disciples were never worthier of imitation than in this. Think of them when a duty is proposed to you from which

you recoil, because there seems but little to encourage, and you must, moreover, be liable to opposition and calumny. Is it apparently a less hopeful thing which you have to take in hand, than the finding so many contingencies satisfied as were to meet, if the two disciples succeeded? the animals of the right kind, standing at a certain place, and at a certain time, the owners consenting to their removal, without receiving price or security. And can the doing what is bidden expose you to more of opposition and calumny than seemed to threaten the disciples, who were to take the property of others, and thus run the risk of being regarded and treated as robbers? Think, moreover, of these disciples when you either long for more honoured employment than has been allotted you by God, or are tempted to decline any duty as beneath you, and fitted only for such as are inferior in office. They were, probably, among the mightiest of Apostles who went into a village to loosen, and lead away, an ass and her foal, at the bidding of Christ. Ah, it were easy to exhibit the disciples under a more imposing point of view, and you might feel it a stirring thing to be bidden to imitate these first preachers of Christianity, as they throw themselves into combat with the idolatries of the world. But the hard thing is to obey Christ on the simple warrant of his word, without objecting the difficulties, or computing the consequences. The hard thing is, to be willing to be as nothing, so long as you may be useful in the Church; to be content

with the lowest place in the household of the Lord, yea, to think it honour to be vile, if it be indeed in Christ's cause. And wishing to urge you, by the example of Apostles, to what is hardest in duty, we do not array these men before you in their lofty enterprise of enlightening ignorance, and overthrowing superstition; we remind you who they were, how commissioned, how endowed, and how exalted; and then we bid you ponder their instant obedience to the command, "Go into the village; straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them, and bring them unto me."

But if there were much worthy of being admired and imitated in the conduct of the disciples, what are we to say to that of the owners of the ass and the colt? It were beside our purpose to inquire into the circumstances or character of these men. Indeed we have no material for such an inquiry, as we are not told whether they had any knowledge of Christ, and can therefore but conjecture their treatment of his pretensions. Thus much, however, is certain—they opposed the removal of their property, but immediately withdrew their opposition, on hearing the words, "The Lord hath need of them." It may be doubted whether they understood the disciples as referring to Christ under the name of "the Lord," or whether they applied the name to God; for the disciples were not instructed to say, "Our Lord hath need of them"—which would have fixed the message to Christ—but "The Lord," a form of expression which

is used absolutely of Deity, as well as of the Mediator. It is not improbable, therefore, that the owners considered that their property was demanded from them in the name of the Almighty, and that, secretly influenced to regard the demand as having actually proceeded from God, they immediately and unhesitatingly complied. At all events, if it were to Christ that they made the surrender, they made it to Him under the title of "the Lord"—thus recognizing a right superior to their own, and confessing in Him that authority which belongs only to God. So that, in whatever measure these men may have been acquainted with Christ, they clearly acted on the principle of their being stewards rather than proprietors, holding possessions at the will of the Almighty, and prepared to give them up so soon as He should ask them. It was enough for them to receive an intimation that God had employment for that which He had deposited with them, and instantly they surrendered it, as though no longer their own.

Were they not herein a great example to ourselves? Every one of us is ready to acknowledge in God the universal proprietor, to confess, at least with the mouth, that every good, which is delivered into our keeping, "cometh down from the Father of lights." The infidelity on such points is almost exclusively a practical infidelity: there may be some, but they are few, so blinded by sensuality, or besotted with pride, that they will boldly ascribe to their own skill what they acquire, and speak and

think as though there were no ruler above who both has bestowed and may reclaim every tittle of their possessions. It is virtually little more than acknowledging the existence of God, to acknowledge that the universe, in its every department, is subject to the control and disposal of its Maker; that He orders, with absolute authority, the portion of every creature, diminishing or augmenting it, making it permanent or variable, at his own good pleasure. And if the acknowledgment were any thing more than in theory, it would follow that men, conscious of holding their property in trust, would strive to employ it in the service of the actual owner, and be ready to part with it, on his indicating the least wish for its removal. But here, alas, it is that the infidelity comes into action; and men, who are most frank with the confession of not being their own, and of holding nothing which belongs not to another, will be as tenacious of possessions as though there were no superior title; as reluctant to give up any portion, even when God Himself asks, as though stewardship implied no accountability.

The owners of the ass and the colt proceeded on the right principle, and should therefore be taken as examples by ourselves. They used the animals for their own pleasure or profit, so long as they were not required by God, but surrendered them, without a moment's hesitation, so soon as they heard "The Lord hath need of them." And this should be the case with every one on whom God has bestowed

earthly wealth. There is nothing to forbid the temperate enjoyment of that wealth—but it is held only in trust; and a due portion should be cheerfully given up, whensoever there is a clear intimation of its being needed by the Lord. Ancient prophecy was to be accomplished. The Redeemer had to make his way into Jerusalem, as the King of Zion, “meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.” Here was the need; and He, whose are “the cattle on a thousand hills,” and who could have commanded the attendance of swarming troops of the beasts of the field, chose to send to men who had but scanty possessions; and these men, admitting at once his rights, gladly surrendered what they owned at his bidding. Ancient prophecy has yet to be accomplished: the Redeemer has to make his way into districts of the earth which have not bowed at his sceptre, into households and hearts which have closed themselves against Him. And though He might command the legions of angels, and cause a miraculous proclamation of his Gospel, it pleases Him to work through human instrumentality—not indeed that the instrumentality can be effectual, except through his blessing, but that it is not his course to produce results, save through the use of instituted means. Here then is the need: and it may justly be said, that, through every statement of spiritual destitution, every account how souls are perishing through “lack of knowledge,” and how the kingdom

of darkness is opposing itself to the kingdom of light, there comes a message to the owners of riches, "The Lord hath need of them."

But who will say that the message ordinarily finds that ready compliance which followed it when delivered by the first disciples of Christ? Indeed, it will be the commencement of a new era in the Church, when to show that "the Lord hath need" of this or that thing, shall suffice to procure its cheerful bestowment. Yet assuredly this is the just ground on which to rest every charitable appeal: let it be an appeal in the cause of God and of Christ, and it is not so much a request for liberality as a demand for justice. The Almighty does but ask his own: you may sin in withholding, but can claim no merit for surrendering. Neither is it exclusively as pointing out the tenure by which we hold our possessions, that there is a lesson in Christ's message to the owners of the ass and the colt. It is a message which should be heard through every afflictive dispensation; for, in one way or another, it may be said that the Lord has need of whatsoever He withdraws from our keeping. If He strip us of property, it may be that we had not made a right use of that property; and, having need of it, He has transferred it to another who will be more faithful in his stewardship. Or, if we be not chargeable with the abuse of our trust, we may be sure that God has taken the earthly riches, in order to attach us more closely to heavenly; and He may

be said to have needed what He took, if He took it that He might carry on his great work of moral discipline.

It is thus also with the removal of what we love and miss more than riches—kinsmen, and children, and friends: “The Lord hath need of them.” Perhaps they have been fully prepared for the glories of heaven: there were places in the celestial temple which awaited them as occupants; and God, with reverence be it spoken, could no longer spare them from his presence. Oh, there is many a death-bed, over which angels might be thought to whisper the words now before us; and if they who stand round the bed should be tempted to ask, “Why is one so excellent to be taken? why are we to be parted from so rare an example of all that is most precious and beautiful in religion?” the best answer might be, “The Lord hath need of him:” the light which has shone so brilliantly below, is now wanted to add to the radiance above. And even if we may not venture on such a statement as this, we may still say that the dead are taken, that the living may be warned: God breaks our earthly ties, to lead us to the commencing or strengthening friendship with Himself; and there can be nothing strained or exaggerated in the saying that “the Lord hath need” of that which He removes, that He may correct and benefit his creatures.

In how many ways then, and through how many voices, is the message syllabled, which Christ sent to

them whose property He required. Hearken for it, and it will come to you through all the wants of your fellow-men, through the prevalence of ignorance, through the pressure of indigence, through the accidents, sorrows, and bereavements of life. In a thousand ways is God saying to us that He has need of our property, need of our talents, need of our time, need of those whom we love, and of that which we cherish. Shall we refuse Him? or, where we have no option, shall we yield up grudgingly, in place of cheerfully, what He requires? Nay, let us take pattern from men to whom probably but little had been entrusted, but who readily gave up that little so soon as it was needed for the service of God. It may be, that we are often inclined to excuse ourselves from imitating scriptural examples, by pleading that the saints of old were of extraordinary character, and in extraordinary circumstances, and cannot therefore with justice be set before us as models. If I hold up the patriarch Job to those on whom sorrow presses hard, and bid them observe how, when children were dead, and possessions destroyed, this man of God meekly said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord" —Yes, is the feeling, if not the answer; but Job was no common man: his name has passed into a proverb; and it is not to be expected that such as we should emulate his marvellous patience. If again, when I would urge men to sacrifices and endurances in the cause of Christ and his Gospel, I dwell on the

example of St. Paul, who counted "all things but loss," that he might know and serve the Redeemer, "in journeyings often, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness"—Yes, is the sentiment, if not the expression; but St. Paul has never had his equal; the wonder of his own and every succeeding generation, we may not think to reach so lofty a standard.

.Thus there is a way of evading the force of scriptural examples: men imagine circumstances of distinction between themselves and eminent saints, and give those circumstances in apology for coming far behind them in piety. Let us then learn from the mean and unknown, of whom we may not plead that they were separated from us by any thing rare in endowment or position. Men who are reluctant to part with property, that it may be employed in the cause of God; parents who would withhold their children from missionary work, or murmur at their being transplanted from earth to heaven; sufferers, to whom is allotted one kind or another of afflictive dispensation, and who rebel under the chastisement, as though it were not for good—come ye all, and learn, if not from exalted persons such as Job and St. Paul, yet from the owners of the ass and the colt which Christ sent for, when designing his last entry to Jerusalem. There is virtually the same message to every one of you as was brought to these poor and unknown individuals. The motive to your surrendering what is asked, or bearing what is imposed, is pre-

cisely the same as was urged upon them. And they will rise up in the judgment and condemn you, if, with all your superior advantages—the advantages of Christianity above Judaism, of an imperfect over an introductory dispensation—you show yourselves less compliant than they were with a summons from the universal Proprietor. Christ, who knoweth the heart, could reckon on readiness, so soon as the owners should be told of his requiring the ass and the colt. May He reckon on the same with us? Ah, let us, when we go hence, consider what we have which God may speedily require at our hands; let us search, and see whether we are prepared to resign it, when asked for by God—be it wealth, or child, or honour, or friend—and let us observe how reluctance is rebuked now, and will be witnessed against hereafter, by the willingness of the owners of the ass and the colt, of whom Christ could affirm, “Say ye, The Lord hath need of them, and straightway they will send them.”

We have thus considered the incidents to which our text has respect, with reference to Christ Himself, to his disciples, and to the owners of the ass and the colt. We have endeavoured to show you that our Lord added to the witness for his being the Messiah, by the prescience and power displayed; and that the manner of the display was admirably appropriate to the wants and circumstances of his followers. We have set before you the disciples as worthy of your close imitation, in that they unhesitatingly

obeyed where they might have plausibly objected, and were as ready for a menial service as for the most honoured and illustrious. And then the owners have been considered, as exemplifying a great principle of which we are apt to lose sight—the principle, that, in the matter of our possessions, we are not proprietors, but stewards, and should therefore hold ourselves ready to part with what we have, so soon as we know that it is needed by the Lord.

They are great lessons, and striking truths, which have thus been derived and illustrated from our text and the context. But, before we conclude, let us dwell for a moment on the vast honour given to humble individuals, in that they were allowed to contribute to the progress of the Saviour, when, accomplishing ancient prediction, He advanced towards the city where He was to sacrifice Himself. I think, that, if the men saw the triumphal procession, the multitude spreading their garments, strewing the way with branches, and burdening the air with Hosannahs, they must have felt an elation of heart, that their beasts should have been chosen for a personage whom thousands thus combined to reverence and honour. The noblest and wealthiest might justly have exulted, had they been allowed to aid the glorious advance: but, as though to show how the mean may serve Him, and how their service shall be owned, Christ openly used the property of the poor, on the single occasion when there was any thing like pomp in his earthly career.

And why should we not gather from this, that, when He shall come in power and great majesty—not the lowly man, entering Jerusalem in a triumph which was itself almost humiliation, but the “King of kings, and Lord of lords”—He will acknowledge and exhibit the services rendered Him by the poor and despised, as well as those wrought by the great ones of the earth? It ought to encourage them who have but little in their power, that it was “the foal of an ass” on which Christ rode, and that this foal, in all probability, belonged to the poor. We may all do something towards that sublime consummation for which the Church watches and prays, when, not from a solitary city, and not from a single and inconstant people, but from ten thousand times ten thousand voices, from every clime, and land, and tongue, shall be heard the shout, “Hosanna to the son of David: blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.” “The Lord hath need” of the strength of the mighty, and of the feebleness of the weak; of the abundance of the rich, and of the mites of the impoverished; and if we will go forth to his help, if each, according to his means and ability, will strive to accelerate the day when “all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest,” we may be sure that our labour shall not be forgotten, when “the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him.” Oh, if there be some of whom it shall then be told that they contributed the rich and the costly towards pre-

paring the way for the advancing Redeemer, of others it may be said that they had not the rich and the costly to give, but that, with a willing heart, they offered their best, though that best was only the refuse and mean. And we do not merely say that the pooriness of the gift shall not cause it to be overlooked: the inconsiderable offering may be shown to have been as instrumental as the magnificent in furthering the progress of the Gospel: He who, when He would accomplish prophecy, entered Jerusalem, not in the rich man's chariot, but on the poor man's ass, may prove that He went forwards to his kingdom, as much through what the feeble wrought in their weakness, as what the mighty effected in their strength.

Let this encourage all, that they be not weary in well-doing. May all make a practical use of the great doctrine of Christ's second coming. Anticipate that coming: realize your own personal share in that coming. He will come "to take account of his servants"—are you ready with your account? have you improved your talents? have you acted up to your ability in furthering the great cause of truth upon earth? Let none think himself either excused or injured by insignificance. There was, you remember, a servant to whom but one talent had been given; and he was bound hand and foot, and cast to "outer darkness," because that one had been hidden, when it might have been put "to the exchangers." There were men who perhaps owned little more than an ass

and a colt, but they were ready to surrender what they had, when needed by Christ ; and lo, they were honoured to the effecting what prophecy had announced in one of its loftiest strains, they were instrumental to the bringing and displaying her King to “the daughter of Zion.”

S E R M O N XIII.

NEHEMIAH BEFORE ARTAXERXES.

NEH. ii. 3, 4, 5.

“I said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchres, that I may build it.”

WHEN the seventy years had expired, during which God, in just judgment for their many offences, had sentenced the Jews to captivity in Babylon, He graciously remembered his promise, and raised them up a deliverer in the person of Cyrus. In the first year of that monarch’s reign, “that the word of the Lord, spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah, might be accomplished,” a royal edict was issued, which not only

permitted the captives to return to their own land, but enjoined that every facility should be afforded to their march, and every assistance rendered them in the rebuilding their city and temple.

It does not appear that immediate and general advantage was taken of this edict; the Jews did not rise as one man, under the influence of a desire to resettle themselves in Palestine. And this is little to be wondered at, if you remember the utter desolation in which Jerusalem and Judea then lay, the arduousness and perils of the journey, and the fact that the captivity had continued so long that few, and those only men fast advancing in years, had ever seen the land of their fathers, or were bound to it by the ties of remembrance or acquaintance. No marvel if there were something of pause and hesitation, if piety and patriotism did not instantly nerve all the exiles to abandon the country which had almost become their's by adoption, and to seek a home where, though they had once been possessors, they would only find themselves strangers. But God purposed the restoration of the people, and therefore, as we read, He raised the spirit of "the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem." And soon, under the guidance of Zerubbabel, there went forth a mixed company of the old and the young, bearing with them not only their own riches, but "the vessels of the house of the Lord:" obstacles were sur-

mounted, dangers escaped, through the assistance and protection of God; and in due time the wanderers reached the spot, hallowed by so many magnificent recollections, and which was yet to be the scene of mightier things than past days had witnessed.

But the difficulties, as you will remember, of the Jews did not terminate with their arrival in Judea; their city and temple were to be rebuilt; and in this great work, they found inveterate adversaries in the Samaritans, who had been settled in the land by Esarhaddon, and who, professing a mixed and spurious religion, wished not the revival of the pure worship of Jehovah. The opposition of these adversaries was so far successful, that Cyrus, the patron of the Jews, being dead, "the work of the house of God" was made to cease "until the second year of the reign of Darius." Then, however, it recommenced, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah stirred up the people, and God inclined the new monarch to re-enact the decree which had been issued by Cyrus. Under these altered circumstances Jerusalem had soon again a temple, which, if inferior to that of Solomon in stateliness of structure, and richness of adornment, was yet prophetically declared destined to far higher dignity, inasmuch as it should receive the promised Messiah: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts."

But when the temple had thus risen, and the in-

spired men were dead whom God had raised up for the instruction and encouragement of the people, there appears to have been great unsettlement in both the civil and ecclesiastical polity of the Jews; as a nation, their position was made precarious by surrounding enemies, and internal confusion; whilst, as the people of God, they had mingled themselves with the people of the lands, and thereby exposed themselves to his wrath. In this crisis, Ezra was raised up, "A ready scribe in the law of Moses:" having obtained sanction and assistance from king Artaxerxes, he visited Jerusalem that he might "teach in Israel statutes and judgments." It would seem to have been almost exclusively to religious matters that Ezra directed his attention; he accomplished a great work in dissolving the unlawful connexions which the Jews had formed with the people of the land; but he did little or nothing towards reinstating his country in the position which it had once held amongst nations. Jerusalem appears to have remained without defences, exposed to the assault of every enemy, and liable at any moment—so ill was it provided with the munitions of war—to be reduced to the ruins from which it had so lately, and as yet so imperfectly, sprung.

Here we come to the actions of another worthy, whose history furnishes the latest canonical records of the Jews till the days of our Lord. When about twelve years had elapsed from the events commemorated in the close of the book of Ezra, we find a

Jew, named Nehemiah, residing in Shushan, the capital of Persia, and filling the office of cup-bearer to Artaxerxes the king. His father, Hachaliah, was probably one of them who had declined to take advantage of the decree of Cyrus, preferring to remain where he had made himself a home, to returning to a country where he must feel himself an alien. The son, Nehemiah, occupying a post of great honour in the Persian court, may never have had an opportunity of visiting Jerusalem, but his heart yearned towards the land and city of his fathers; with the spirit of a true patriot, he sought eagerly for information as to the condition of his countrymen, and longed to be instrumental in advancing their prosperity. The information came: Hanani, one of his brethren, and certain men of Judah, reached Shushan from Jerusalem, perhaps disheartened by the difficulties which they had experienced, and accounting it better to resettle in the land in which they had been captives. They gave Nehemiah a melancholy, though not, as it would seem, an exaggerated account. "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire."

And now it was that the man of piety appeared in the man of patriotism; and admirably does Nehemiah stand forth as an example to them who profess to have at heart their country's good, and to be stricken by its calamities. He did not immediately

call a meeting of the Jews, to consult what might be done for their afflicted countrymen. He did not gather round him a knot of politicians, that plans might be discussed, and assistance levied. But, as one who knew in calamity the offspring of sin, and in the Almighty the single patron of the distressed, Nehemiah "sat down, and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven."

But Nehemiah did not count his part done when he had thus, in all humility, confessed the sins of his nation, and entreated the interference of God. He was not one of them who substitute prayer for endeavour, though he would not make an endeavour until he had prepared himself by prayer. Fortified through humiliation and supplication, he now sought to take advantage of his position with the king, and, true patriot as he was, to render that position useful to his countrymen. Nearly four months elapsed from his interview with Hanani, before an opportunity occurred for his addressing Artaxerxes. There was probably a rotation in the office of cup-bearer, which obliged him to await his turn; and it was at the hazard of life to any one to enter, unbidden, into the presence of the Persian monarch. But in the month of Nisan he stood before Artaxerxes, and he "took up the wine, and gave it unto the king." He was now, however, heavy at heart, and the handing the sparkling draught to the monarch at his banquet ill assorted with a mind distracted and sad. He had not the skill, indeed he could not have had the wish,

to disguise his feelings, and affect a cheerfulness which he did not experience. It was his object to attract the attention of the king; to do this he had only to allow his countenance to betray what, perhaps, he could hardly have forced it to conceal—for we are expressly told that he had never “beforetime been sad in his presence”—so that the altered demeanour was immediately observed, and its reason demanded with all the quickness of eastern suspicion.

And here it is that we reach the very simple, but touching, narration of our text. Nehemiah was sore afraid, when Artaxerxes, struck with the sorrow depicted on his features, imperiously asked the cause of the too evident grief. It was the moment for which he had wished, yea, for which he had prayed, yet, now that it had come, he felt so deeply what consequences hung upon a word, that he was almost unmanned, and could scarce venture to unburden his heart. He spake, however, and, first offering the customary wish on behalf of the king, asked how he could be other than sad, whilst the city, the place of the sepulchres of his fathers, lay desolate and waste, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire? Upon this, Artaxerxes demanded what request he had to make; and Nehemiah, though his answer had of course to be immediately given, gave it not till he had strengthened himself by silent petition to one greater than the king; he “prayed to the God of heaven,” and then entreated permission to go unto

Judah, and build up the city of the sepulchres of his fathers.

The request was successful, though the passage, which we have selected as our subject of discourse, does not require us to refer to subsequent events in the history of Nehemiah. There is enough in this passage itself to require and repay the most serious attention; and we have but engaged you with a somewhat lengthened review of foregoing circumstances, that you might the better appreciate what is here recorded of the conduct of Nehemiah. The two prominent facts on which we wish to seize, do indeed widely differ the one from the other, so that, in making them the subject of a single discourse, we cannot hope to preserve that continuousness of thought which is generally to be desired in addresses from the pulpit. But forasmuch as the facts come together in Scripture, it must be every way right that they be gathered, as we now propose, into one and the same sermon. The facts are these; the first, that it was as the city of his fathers' sepulchres that Jerusalem excited the solicitude of Nehemiah; the second, that Nehemiah found a moment before answering the king, to offer petition to the Almighty. Let us have your close attention to these very interesting, though unconnected, topics; our first topic is, the peculiar plea which Nehemiah urges with Artaxerxes; our second, the ejaculatory prayer which went up from Nehemiah to God.

Now Jerusalem had not yet received its most illustrious distinction, forasmuch as "the fulness of time" had not arrived, and, therefore, there had not yet been transacted within her circuits the wondrous scenes of the redemption of the world. She was reserved for more stupendous and startling things than past days had witnessed, fraught though her history had been with miracle and prodigy: her streets were to be trodden by the incarnate God, and on the summit of Moriah was the promised seed of the woman, bruised Himself in the heel, to accomplish the first prophecy, and bruise the serpent's head. Nevertheless, to every man, and especially to a devout Jew, there were already reasons in abundance why thought should turn to Jerusalem, and centre there as on a place of peculiar sanctity and interest. There, had a temple been reared, "magnificent" beyond what earth beforetime had seen, rich with the marble and the gold, but richer in the visible tokens of the presence of the universal Lord. There, had sacrifices been continually offered, whose efficacy was manifest even to them who discerned not their typical import, forasmuch as at times they prevailed to the arrest of temporal visitations, and pestilence was dispersed by the smoke of the oblation. There, had monarchs reigned of singular and widespread renown; the fame of one, at least, had gone out to the ends of the earth, and nations had flocked to hear the wisdom which fell from his lips. There, had been enacted a long series of judgments and

deliverances; the chastisements of heaven following so visibly upon wickedness, and its protection on repentance, that the most casual beholder might have certified himself that the supreme Being held the reins of government, and was carrying out the laws of a rigid retribution.

Hence, it might easily have been accounted for why Nehemiah should have looked with thrilling interest to Jerusalem, even if you had kept out of sight his close connexion with those who were striving to reinstate it in strength, and had not supposed any travelling onwards of his mind to the wonders with which prophecy yet peopled its walls. But the observable thing is, that Nehemiah fixes not on any of these obvious reasons, when he would explain, or account for, his interest in Jerusalem. He describes the city; but he describes it only as "the place of his fathers' sepulchres:" and this he insists upon, as of itself sufficient to justify his urgency, pleading it alike when he would explain why his countenance was sad, and when he stated to the king the favour which he sought at his hands. Before he offered his silent prayer to God, and afterwards, when he might be supposed to have received fresh wisdom from above, he spake, you observe, of the city merely as of the place of the sepulchres of his fathers, as though no stronger reason could be given why he should wish to rebuild it; none, at least, whose force was more felt by himself, or more likely to be confessed by the king. The language of Nehemiah is too ex-

press and too personal, to allow of our supposing that he adopted it merely from thinking that it would prevail with Artaxerxes: if there were truthfulness in this worthy, it was the desecration of his fathers' sepulchres which chiefly disquieted him; it was the wish of restoring these sepulchres which mainly urged to his visiting Jerusalem. Ponder these facts for a few moments; they are full, we think, of beauty and interest.

If we may argue from the expressions of Nehemiah, then, it is a melancholy sight—that of a ruined town, a shattered navy, or a country laid waste by famine and war; but there is a more melancholy sight still, that of a churchyard, where sleeps the dust of our kindred, desecrated and destroyed, whether by violence or neglect. You know, that if poetry or fiction would place its hero in a position to draw upon himself the pity and sympathy of the reader, there is nothing in which it more delights than in the bringing i m, after long wanderings as an exile, to the scenes where his childhood was passed, and making him there find the home of his ancestry deserted and ruined. And as the lonely man makes painfully his way through the scene of desolation, the wild winds syllabbling, as it would seem, the names of other days, there is felt to be a depth and sacredness in his misfortunes, which must insure his being the object of a more than common compassion.

But, according to Nehemiah, there is another posi-

tion which is yet more deserving of sympathy. Let us suppose a man to have paid the last sad offices to parents whom he justly revered; he has laid them in a decent grave, and, with filial piety, erected a simple monument over their remains. And then he has gone to distant lands, and worn away many years in separation from all kinsmen, though not without frequent turnings of the heart to the home of young days. At length he revisits his native shore, and finds, as in such cases is commonly found, that of the many friends whom he had left, scarcely one remains to welcome him back. Disappointed at not being known by the living, he seeks the companionship of the dead; he hastens to the village churchyard where his parents sleep; they will speak to him from the grave, and he shall no longer seem lonely. But he can hardly find the grave; the monuments are levelled; with difficulty can he assure himself that the tombs themselves have not been profaned, and the bones of the dead sacrilegiously disturbed. Oh, will not this be the most heartbreaking thing of all? There is something so ungenerous in forgetfulness or contempt of the dead—they cannot speak for themselves; they so seem, in dying, to bequeath their dust to survivors, as though they would give affection something to cherish, and some kind office still to perform; that, from graves wantonly neglected or invaded, there might always appear to issue the pathetic complaint, “We have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against us.”

And we cannot but think that the feelings of the man whom we have thus carried, not to the ruined mansion, but to the ruined mausoleum of his ancestry, would be a full explanation why Nehemiah laid such emphasis on the fact which he selected, when he sought to move Artaxerxes; why he omitted all reference to Jerusalem in its magnificence, to the thrones of monarchs, the schools of prophets, the altars of sacrifice; and simply said, "Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?"

We do not, however, suppose that the strong marks of respect for the dead, which occur so frequently in the Bible, are to be thoroughly accounted for by the workings of human feelings and affections. We must have recourse to the great doctrine of the resurrection of the body, if we would fully understand why the dying Joseph "gave commandment concerning his bones," and Nehemiah offered no description of Jerusalem, but that it was the place of the sepulchres of his fathers. And there is no need here for entering into any inquiry as to the degree of acquaintance with the doctrine of the resurrection which was possessed under the old dispensation. If you find language used which cannot be adequately interpreted but by supposing a knowledge of the body's resurrection, it must rather become us to infer that men were then informed of this truth, than to con-

clude, on any other grounds, that it was altogether hidden.

But when you bring into the account the doctrine of the resurrection, it is no longer merely as a man of strong natural feelings, but as an ardent believer in the loftiest truths, that the supposed visiter to the desecrated churchyard might be confounded and overcome. The doctrine of the resurrection throws, as you must all admit, a sacredness round the remains of the dead, because it proves, that, though we have committed the body to the ground, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust," that body is reserved for noble allotments, destined to reappear in a loftier scene, and discharge more glorious functions. It were a light spirit which should not be overawed amid the ruins of a temple, which should recognize nothing solemn in the mouldering piles which it knew to have once canopied the more immediate presence of God; especially if it further knew, that, on some approaching day, the ruins would be reinstated in symmetry and strength, forming again a structure whose walls should be instinct with Deity, and from whose recesses, as from awful shrines, should issue the voice of the Eternal. The dead body is that fallen temple: consecrated upon earth as the habitation of the Holy Ghost, it decays only that it may be more gloriously rebuilt, and that God may dwell in it for ever above. Therefore is it no slight impiety to show contempt or neglect of the dead. It is contempt or

neglect of a sanctuary; and how can this be shown but with contempt or neglect of the Being to whom it is devoted?

And there is yet more to be said; the doctrine of the resurrection is the crowning doctrine of revelation; Christ was "raised again for our justification:" "if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." He, therefore, who would forget, make light of, or deny the doctrine of the resurrection, sets himself against no solitary article of the faith; it is Christianity in its integrity which is at stake; it is all that is comforting, all that is saving in its tenets, which is displaced or disputed. He, on the other hand, who is earnest in defence of the doctrine of the resurrection, and eager to show that he values it as well as believes, does not, therefore, confine himself to a single truth of our holy religion: the sufficiency of the atonement, the completeness of redemption, the pardon of every sin, the opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers, these he sees written, as they nowhere else are, in that general emptying of the sepulchres which he is taught to anticipate—these are preached to him most convincingly by the trumpet of the archangel, whose peal already falls on the watchful ear of faith. Then the well-kept churchyard, with its various monuments, each inscribed with lines not more laudatory of the past than hopeful of the future, what is it but the

public testimony to all that is precious in Christianity, forasmuch as it is the public testimony that the dead shall live again? Whereas, if tablets be defaced, graves desecrated, and the solemn inclosure surrendered to insult and neglect, it is not merely that the dead are dishonoured, and that violence is thus done to the best feelings of our nature; it is that great slight is thrown on all which, as immortal beings, we are most bound to hold dear, a great acknowledgment apparently withdrawn of truths without which "we are of all men most miserable." It is easy and specious to enlarge on the folly of paying honour to the prey of the worm, conveying with so much parade to the grave that which is turning into a mass of corruption, and then, perhaps, erecting a stately cenotaph to perpetuate the name of a certain portion of dust. And satire may readily point bitter and caustic lines, as the corpse of the owner of princely estates is borne along to the ancient mausoleum, in all the gloomy magnificence which distinguishes the obsequies of the great; and ask, with a sort of cutting severity, whether it be not almost like upbraiding the dead, to pour this stern gorgeousness round the most humbling of earthly transactions? But we have no sympathy whatsoever with this common feeling, that there should be nothing of solemn pomp in consigning the human body to the grave. We might have, if we knew nothing of a resurrection. But not whilst we believe in the general Easter of this creation. Not whilst we believe that the grave is but a tem-

porary habitation, and that what is "sown a natural body" is to be "raised a spiritual." The funeral procession attests, and does homage to, the doctrine of the resurrection. It is not in honour of the body as mouldering into dust that we would have decent rites, or even, where consistent with rank, a sumptuous ceremonial attending its interment; but in honour of the body as destined to come forth gloriously and indissolubly reconstructed. We have no affection for the proud monument, if it were only to mark where the foul worm has banqueted; but we look with pleasure on the towering marble, as indicating a spot where "the trump of God" shall cause a sudden and mysterious stir, and Christ win a triumph as "the Resurrection and the life."

Then suppose Nehemiah acquainted, as we are, with the doctrine of the resurrection, and we do but find in the emphasis laid upon the fact, that Jerusalem was the place of his fathers' sepulchres, the testimony of his belief in the truths of redemption, and of his desire to make and keep those truths known to the world. "I cannot bear," he seems to say, "that my fathers, who once witnessed from their graves to the most illustrious of facts, should be silent in the dust. I long to give again a thrilling voice to their remains: I would people their cemeteries with heralds of futurity. I may well be downcast when I think of their monuments as levelled with the earth; not because I ostentatiously desire that proud marbles may certify the greatness of my parentage, but

because I would fain that men should thence draw evidence of general judgment and eternal life. I mourn not so much that Jerusalem has ceased to be a queen amongst cities; I long not so much that she should rise from her ashes, to be again imperial in beauty: I mourn that her desecrated graves speak no longer of a resurrection; I long that, through respect for the dead, she may be again God's witness of the coming immortality. Oh, why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste? If thy servant have found favour in thy sight, O king, send me unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it."

Now it is a wholly different, but not a less interesting subject, to which we have to give the remainder of our discourse. We are now to detach our minds from Nehemiah pleading for his fathers' sepulchres, and fix them upon Nehemiah addressing himself to God in ejaculatory prayer. It is among the most remarkable statements of the Bible, "So I prayed to the God of heaven," coming, as it does, between the question of the king, "For what dost thou make request?" and the answer of Nehemiah, "That thou wouldest send me unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres." There is no interval of time: Nehemiah has had no opportunity of retiring, that he might present supplications to God. He has not knelt down—he has given no outward sign, unless perhaps a momentary uplifting of the eye, of holding communion with an invisible being; and nevertheless,

there, in the midst of that thronged and brilliant court, and in the seconds that might elapse between a question and its answer, he has prayed unto God for direction and strength, and received, as we may believe, assistance from heaven. No one can well doubt what it was for which Nehemiah prayed: it may justly be supposed to have been, that God would aid him in preferring his request, and dispose Artaxerxes to grant it. And when you observe that the request appears to have been at once successful—for it pleased the king to send Nehemiah, and to grant him royal letters, which might facilitate the repairs of Jerusalem—you must allow that prayer was not only offered, but answered, in the moment which seemed too brief for all but a thought.

Under how practical and comforting a point of view does this place the truth of the omnipresence of God. It is a high mystery, one which quickly bewilders the understanding, and wearies even the imagination, that of God being every where present, incapable, from his nature, of leaving this place and passing to that, but always and equally occupying every spot in immensity, so as never to be nearer to us, and never further from us, continually at our side, and yet continually at the side of every other being in the measureless universe. Yet, with all its mysteriousness, this is no merely sublime but barren speculation, no subject to exercise the mind rather than benefit the heart. It should minister wondrously to our comfort, to know that, whether we

can explain it or not, we are always, so to speak, in contact with God; so that in the crowd and in the solitude, in the retirement of the closet, the bustle of business, and the privacies of home, by day and by night, He is alike close at hand, near enough for every whisper, and plenteous enough for every want. It is not so with a human patron or friend, who, whatever be his power, and his desire to use it on our behalf, cannot always be with us, to observe each necessity, and appoint each supply. We have to seek out this friend or patron, when we require his help: probably he is distant from us when the most needed; and we have to send a message, which brings no reply till the season have passed when it might be of avail. How different with God! in less time than I can count, the desire of my heart may be transmitted to this invisible Guardian and Guide, find gracious audience, and bring down upon me the blessing which I need.

If there be opportunity, then truly it may become me to seek audience with greater and more palpable solemnity, prostrating myself reverently before Him, as the all-glorious King, and giving devout expression to my wishes and wants. But it is not indispensable to the audience, that there should be this outward prostration, and this set supplication. The heart has but to breathe its desire, and God is acquainted with it so soon as formed, and may grant it, if He will, before the tongue could have given it utterance. O that there were in us more of that

habit of prayer, which, as with Nehemiah, would not suffer us to make request to man, without first sending up a silent petition to God. When Scripture speaks of praying "without ceasing," and of "continuing instant in prayer," it is generally thought to prescribe what cannot be actually done, at least not by them who are necessarily much occupied with temporal concerns. And if there were no prayer but those more solemn and stated acts, when, whether in private, or in the public assembly, we set ourselves specifically to the spreading our wants before our Father in heaven, these expressions of Holy Writ would have to be interpreted with certain restrictions, or would belong in their fulness to such only as might abstract themselves altogether from the world. But forasmuch as God is always so ready and able to hear that ejaculatory prayer, the sudden utterance of the heart, when there is no place for the bending of the knee, and no time even for the motion of the lip, may obtain instant audience and answer, what is to prevent there being that devotional habit which shall fulfil the injunction of praying "without ceasing," even though, as with numbers of our race, there be but few moments in the day which, snatched from necessary toil, can be professedly consecrated to communion with heaven?

You have heard of, and are acquainted with, public prayer, and private prayer, and family prayer: but the prayer of which we now speak, ejaculatory prayer, differs from all these. As the name denotes,

the heart should be as a bow, kept always strung, ready at any moment to launch prayer as an arrow; a dart which, if small, may yet go faster and further than the weightier implement of more laboured attempt. The man of business, he need not enter on a single undertaking without prayer; the mariner, he need not unfurl a sail without prayer; the traveller, he need not face a danger without prayer; the statesman, he need not engage in a debate without prayer; the invalid, he need not try a remedy without prayer; the accused, he need not meet an accuser without prayer. Is it that all and each of these must make a clear scene, ask time for retirement, and be left for a season alone with the Almighty? That were impossible: as with Nehemiah, what is done must be done on the moment, and in the presence of fellow-men. And it may be done. Blessed be God for this privilege of ejaculatory prayer, of silent, secret, instantaneous petition! We may live at the foot of the mercy-seat, and yet be immersed in merchandize, engrossed with occupation, or pursued by a crowd. We may hallow and enlighten every thing by prayer, though we seem, and are engaged from morning to night with secular business, and thronged by eager adherents. We cannot be in a difficulty for which we have not time to ask guidance, in a peril so sudden that we cannot find a guardian, in a spot so remote that we may not people it with supporters. Thought, whose rapid flight distances itself, moves but half as quick as prayer:

earth to heaven, and heaven again to earth, the petition and the answer, both are finished in that indivisible instant which suffices for the mind's passage through infinite space. O that you may not neglect the privilege, that you may cultivate the habit, of ejaculatory prayer! and that you may, meditate on the example of Nehemiah. If I would incite you to habits of private devotion, I might show you Daniel in his chamber, "kneeling upon his knees three times a day." If I would commend to you the public gatherings of the Church, I might remind you of what David has said, "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand." If I would inculcate the duty of family prayer, I might turn attention to Philemon, and "the Church in his house." But, wishing to make you carry, as it were, the altar about with you—the fire ever burning, the censer ever ready—wishing that you may resolve nothing, attempt nothing, face nothing, without prayer to God for his ever-mighty grace, I give you for a pattern Nehemiah—who, asked by Artaxerxes for what he made request, tells you, "So I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said unto the king, Send me unto Judah, the city of the sepulchres of my fathers."

There is nothing that we need add in the way of concluding exhortation. The latter part, at least, of our subject has been so eminently practical, that we should fear to weaken the impression by repetition. Only, if there be any thing sacred and touching in the sepulchres of our fathers; if the spot, where those

dear to us sleep, seem haunted by their memory, so that it were like forgetting or insulting them to suffer it to be defiled, let us remember that the best monument which we can rear to the righteous is our copy of their excellence—not the record of their virtues graven on the marble or on the brass, but their example repeated in our actions and habits. If with Nehemiah we would show respect to the dead, with Nehemiah let us strive to be useful to the living. Then, when sepulchres shall crumble, not through human neglect, but because the Almighty bids them give back their prey, we may hope to meet our fathers in the triumph and the gloriousness of immortality. Our countenances shall not be sad, though “the place of their sepulchres lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire,” even with the last tremendous conflagration; we shall exult in knowing that they and we “have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

S E R M O N X I V .

JABEZ¹.

1 CHRON. iv. 9, 10.

“And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.”

IF we had to fix on a portion of Scripture which might be removed from our Bibles without being much missed, we should probably select the first nine chapters of this first Book of Chronicles. A mere record of names, a catalogue of genealogies; the eye glances rapidly over them, and we are inclined

¹ This Sermon was preached on New Year's day, and a collection was afterwards made in aid of a District Visiting Society.

to hasten on to parts which may present something more interesting and instructive. Yet what a startling, what an impressive thing, should be a record of names, a catalogue of genealogies! the chapters deserve the closest attention, even if you keep out of sight their bearing on the descent and parentage of the Christ. It is a New Year's day sermon, this long list of fathers and their children. What are all these names which fill page after page? The names of beings who were once as warm with life as ourselves; who moved upon the earth as we move now; who had their joys, their sorrows, their hopes, their fears, their projects; who thought, perhaps, as little of death as many of us, but who were sooner or later cut down, even as all now present shall be. They are the names of those who once lived; nay, they are the names of those who still live; and this is perhaps even the harder to realize of the two. The dead are not dead; they have but changed their place of sojourn. The mighty catalogue, which it wearies us to look at, is not a mere register of those who have been, of trees of the forest which, having flourished their appointed time, have withered or been cut down; it is a register of existing, intelligent, sentient creatures: not one who has been inscribed on the scroll which, headed by Adam, looks like a leaf from the volume of eternity, has ever passed into nothingness: written amongst the living, he was written amongst the immortal; earth might receive his dust, but his spirit, which is more nearly himself,

has never known even a suspension of being: thousands of years ago the man was; at this moment the man is; thousands of years to come the man shall be.

We repeat it—there is something very hard to realize in this fact, that all who have ever lived are still alive¹. We talk of an overpeopled country, even of an overpeopled globe—where and what, then, is the territory into which generation after generation has been swept, the home of the untold myriads, the rich, the poor, the mighty, the mean, the old, the young, the righteous, the wicked, who, having once been reckoned amongst men, must everlastingly remain inscribed in the chronicles of the race; inscribed in them, not as beings which have been, but as beings which are? We have all heard of the dissolute man, said to have been converted through hearing the fifth chapter of the Book of Genesis, in which mention is made of the long lives of Adam, Seth, Enos, Methuselah, and others, and each notice is concluded with the words, “and he died.” It came appallingly home to the dissolute man, that the most protracted life must end at last in death; he could not get rid of the fact that life had to terminate, and he found no peace till he had provided that it might terminate well. But suppose that each notice had been concluded, as it might have been, with the words, “and he lives,” would there not have been as

¹ This fact is excellently treated in a striking sermon by Mr. Newman, on “the Individuality of the Soul.”

much, would there not have been more, to startle and seize upon the dissolute man? "He died," does not necessarily involve a state of retribution; "he lives," crowds the future with images of judgment and recompense. You hear men often say, in regard of something which has happened, something which they have lost, something which they have done, or something which they have suffered, "Oh, it will be all the same a hundred years hence." All the same a hundred years hence! far enough from that. They speak as if they should certainly be dead a hundred years hence, and as if, therefore, it would then necessarily have become unimportant what turn or course events may have taken. Whereas, they will be as truly alive a hundred years hence as they are now; and it will not be the same a hundred years hence whether this thing happened or that, this action were performed or that. For there is nothing so trivial but that it may affect man's future being: in the moral world, as in the physical, "no motion impressed by natural causes, or by human agency, is ever obliterated¹:" of what, then, dare we affirm,

¹ Babbage, the ninth Bridgewater Treatise.—"What a strange chaos is this wide atmosphere we breathe. Every atom, impressed with good and with ill, retains at once the motions which philosophers and sages have imparted to it, mixed and combined in ten thousand ways with all that is worthless and base. The air itself is one vast library, on whose pages are for ever written all that man has ever said, or ever whispered. There, in their mutable but unerring characters, mixed with the earliest as well as

that, let it be as it may, it will be all the same a hundred, or a thousand, or a million years hence?

We recur, then, to what gave rise to these remarks; the long lists of names which occupy the first nine chapters of this First Book of Chronicles. We affirm of these lists, that, without any comment, they furnish a most appropriate sermon for New Year's day. Names of the dead, and yet names of the living, how should their mere enumeration suggest the thought of our days upon earth being as a shadow, and yet of those days being days of probation for an everlasting existence! And what thought is so fitted to New Year's day, when, as we commence one of the great divisions of time, the very season might seem to speak of the rapid flight of life, and of the consequent duty of attempting forthwith preparation for the future? To read these chapters of the Chronicles, is like entering a vast cemetery where sleep

the latest sighs of mortality, stand for ever recorded, vows unredeemed, promises unfulfilled, perpetuating, in the united movements of each particle, the testimony of man's changeful will.

“If the Almighty stamped on the brow of the earliest murderer the indelible and visible mark of his guilt, He has also established laws by which every succeeding criminal is not less irrevocably chained to the testimony of his crime; for every atom of his mortal frame, through whatever changes its severed particles may migrate, will still retain, adhering to it through every combination, some movement derived from that very muscular effort by which the crime itself was perpetrated.”—Chapter ix. “On the Permanent Impression of our Words and Actions on the Globe we inhabit.”

the dead of many generations. But a cemetery is the place for a New Year's day meditation, seeing that we have just consigned the old year to the grave, with its joys, its sorrows, its plans, its events, its mercies, its sins. And are they dead, the multitudes whose names are inscribed on the gloomy walls and crowded stones of the cemetery, Gomer, and Javan, and Tubal, and Nahor? Nay, not so: their dust indeed is beneath our feet, but even that dust shall live again; and all the while their spirits, conscious still, sentient still, occupy some unknown region, miserable or happy beyond what they ever were upon earth, though reserved for yet more of wretchedness or gladness at an approaching resurrection and general judgment. Neither is the past year dead: not a moment of it but lives and breathes, not one of its buried occurrences that has not a present existence, exercising some measure of influence over our actual condition, and reserved to exercise a yet stronger, when it shall come forth as a witness at the last dread assize, bearing testimony which must help to determine whether we are to be for ever with the Lord, or banished for ever from the light of his presence. Thus these registered names might themselves serve as an appropriate sermon. God is witness that it is in perfect sincerity, and with every sentiment of Christian affection, that, adopting the customary language, I wish you all a happy new year. But I must give a voice to the old year. It must speak to you from its sepulchre. No burying

of the past as though it were never to revive. No reading of names in the Chronicles as though they were names of those who have altogether ceased to be. Oh, I wish you a happy new year; but happy it shall not, cannot be, in any such sense as befits beings of such origin, such capacity, such destiny as yourselves, unless you bear diligently in mind that you are mortal, yet cannot die; that things may be past, yet cannot perish; that days may be forgotten, but never can forget.

We should receive, however, a wrong impression in regard of these chapters of the First Book of Chronicles, were we to suppose them valuable only on such accounts as have already been indicated. They are not a mere record of names, though, on a cursory glance, we might conclude that they contained nothing else, and that therefore, after one or two general reflections, we might safely proceed to more instructive portions of Scripture. Interspersed with the names, there occur, here and there, brief, but pregnant, notices of persons and things, as though inserted to reward the diligent student, who, in place of taking for granted that a catalogue of names could not be worth reading, should go through it with all care, fearing to miss some word of information or admonition.

Our text is a remarkable case in point. Here is a chapter which seems made up of genealogies and names. Let me skip it, might be the feeling of the reader; what good can I get from learning that

“Penuel was the father of Gedor, and Ezer the father of Hushah?” But if he were to skip it he would miss one of the most beautiful and interesting passages in the Bible, for such, we think to show you, is a just description of our text. We know nothing whatsoever of the Jabez here commemorated beyond what we find in these two verses. But this is enough to mark him out as worthy, in no ordinary degree, of being admired and imitated. There is a depth, and a comprehensiveness, in the registered prayer of this unknown individual—unknown except from that prayer—which should suffice to make him a teacher of the righteous in every generation. And if we wanted a prayer especially suited to New Year’s day, where could we find more appropriate utterances? If we would begin, as we ought to begin, the year with petitions that such portion of it as God may appoint us to spend upon earth may be spent in greater spiritual enlargement, in deeper purity of heart and of life, and in more abundant experience of the goodness of the Lord, than may have marked the past year, what more copious, more adequate, expressions could any one of us use than these, “Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil that it may not grieve me?” Happy, happy man, happy woman, happy child, who should pray this prayer in faith, and thus insure that it shall have to be said, as of Jabez, “And God granted him that which he re-

quested." But this is anticipating our subject. Let us now take the several parts of the text in succession, commenting upon each, and searching out the lessons which may be useful to ourselves. The first verse contains a short account of Jabez; the second is occupied by his prayer. Come, and let us see whether there be not something to instruct us even in the brief narrative of his life, and whether, as "strangers and pilgrims upon earth," with a battle to fight, a race to run, an inheritance to possess, we can find more appropriate supplications than those in which this Jabez called on the Lord God of Israel.

Now there is no denying—for it is forced on us by every day's experience—that we are short-sighted beings, so little able to look into the future that we constantly miscalculate as to what would be for our good, anticipating evil from what is working for benefit, and reckoning upon benefit from that which may prove fraught with nothing but evil. How frequently does that which we have baptized with our tears make the countenance sunny with smiles! how frequently, again, does that which we have welcomed with smiles wring from us tears! That which has raised anxious thoughts proves often a rich source of joy; and, as often, that which hardly cost us a care, so bright was its promise, wounds to the quick, and burdens us with grief. We do not know the particular reasons which influenced the mother of Jabez to call him by that name, a name which means "Sorrowful." We are merely told, "His mother called

his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow." Whether it were that she brought forth this son with more than common anguish, or whether, as it may have been, the time of his birth were the time of her widowhood, so that the child came and found no father to welcome him—the mother evidently felt but little of a mother's joy, and looked on her infant with forebodings and fears. Perhaps it could hardly have been her own bodily suffering which made her fasten on the boy a dark and gloomy appellation, for, the danger past, she would rather have given a name commemorative of deliverance, remembering "no more her anguish for joy that a man was born into the world." Indeed, when Rachel bare Benjamin, she called his name Benoni, that is, the son of my sorrow; but then it was "as her soul was in departing, for she died." And when there pressed upon a woman in her travail heavier things than her bodily pains—as with the wife of Phinehas, to whom were brought the sad "tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead"—the mind could fix on the more fatal facts, and perpetuate their remembrance through the name of the child; she called—and it was with her last breath, for she too, like Rachel, died—she called the child Ichabod, "saying, The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken."

We may well, therefore, suppose that the mother of Jabez had deeper and more lasting sorrows to

register in the name of her boy than those of the giving him birth. And, whatsoever may have been the cause, whether domestic affliction or public calamity, we may consider the woman as having bent in bitterness over her new-born child, having only tears to give him as his welcome to the world, and feeling it impossible to associate with him even a hope of happiness. She had probably looked with different sentiments on her other children. She had clasped them to her breast with all a mother's gladness, and gazed upon them in the fond anticipation of their proving the supports and comforts of her own declining years. But with Jabez it was all gloom; the mother felt as if she could never be happy again: this boy brought nothing but an accession of care, anxiety, and grief; and if she must give him a name, let it be one which may always remind himself and others of the dark heritage to which he had been born. And yet the history of the family is gathered into the brief sentence, "Jabez was more honourable than his brethren." The child of sorrow outstripped all the others in those things which are "acceptable to God, and approved of men." Nothing is told us of his brethren, except that they were less honourable than himself; they too may have been excellent, and perhaps as much is implied, but Jabez took the lead, and, whether or not the youngest in years, surpassed every other in piety and renown. Oh, if the mother lived to see the manhood of her sons, how strangely must the name Jabez, a name probably

given in a moment of despondency and faithlessness, have fallen on her ear, as it was woven into message after message, each announcing that the child of sorrow was all that the most affectionate parent could wish, and more than the most aspiring could have hoped. She may then have regretted the gloomy and ominous name, feeling as though it reproached her for having yielded to her grief, and allowed herself to give way to dreary forebodings. It may have seemed to her as a standing memorial of her want of confidence in God, and of the falseness of human calculations; and as she embraced Jabez, whose every action endeared, as it ennobled him the more, she may have felt that the sorrow had to be transferred from the name to her own heart; she herself had to grieve, but only that, through mistrust of the Lord, she had recorded her fear where she should have exhibited her faith.

And is not this brief notice of the mother of Jabez full of warning and admonition to ourselves? How ready are we to give the name Jabez to persons or things, which, could we but look into God's purpose, or repose on his promise, we might regard as designed to minister permanently to our security and happiness. "All these things," said the patriarch Jacob, "are against me," as one trial after another fell to his lot: if he had been asked to name each event, the loss of Joseph, the binding of Simeon, the sending away of Benjamin, he would have written Jabez upon each—so dark did it seem to him, so

sure to work only woe. And yet, as you all know, it was by and through these gloomy dealings that a merciful God was providing for the sustenance of the patriarch and his household, for their support and aggrandizement in a season of extraordinary pressure. As Joseph said to his brethren, "God did send me before you to preserve life"—what man would have named Jabez was God's minister for good. Thus it continually happens in regard of ourselves. We give the sorrowful title to that which is designed for the beneficent end. Judging only by present appearances, allowing our fears and feelings, rather than our faith, to take the estimate or fix the character of occurrences, we look with gloom on our friends, and with melancholy on our sources of good. Sickness, we call it Jabez, though it may be sent to minister to our spiritual health; poverty, we call it Jabez, though coming to help us to the possession of heavenly riches; bereavement, we call it Jabez, though designed to graft us more closely into the household of God. O for a better judgment! or rather, O for a simpler faith! We cannot indeed see the end from the beginning, and therefore cannot be sure that what rises in cloud will set in vermilion and gold; but we need not take upon ourselves to give the dark name, as though we could not be deceived in regard of the nature. The mother of him who proved "more honourable than his brethren" may have been unable to prognosticate aught but sorrow for and from this child—so much of threatening

aspect may have hung round his entrance upon life—but she should have called him by a name expressive of dependence on God, rather than of despondency and soreness of heart.

Let us derive this lesson from the concise but striking narrative in the first verse of our text. Let us neither look confidently on what promises best, nor despairingly on what wears the most threatening appearance. God often wraps up the withered leaf of disappointment in the bright purple bud, and as often enfolds the golden flower of enjoyment in the nipped and blighted shoot. Experience is full of evidence that there is no depending on appearances; that things turn out widely different from what could have been anticipated: the child of most promise perhaps living to pierce as with a sword, the child of least, to apply balsam to the wound; events which have menaced ministering to happiness, and those which have come like enemies doing the office of friends. So that, if there be one duty more pressed upon us by what we might observe than another, it is that of waiting meekly upon the Lord, never cherishing a wish that we might choose for ourselves, and never allowing a doubt that He orders all for our good. Oh, be careful that you pronounce not harshly of his dealings, that you provoke Him not by speaking as though you could see through his purpose, and decide on its being one of unmixed calamity. If you are so ready with your gloomy names, He may suspend his gracious designs. If, in a spirit of repining

or unbelief, you brand as Jabez what may be but a blessing in disguise, no marvel if sometimes, in just anger and judgment, He allow the title to prove correct, and suffer not this Jabez, this child born in sorrow, to become to you, as otherwise it might, more honourable, more profitable, than any of its brethren.

But let us now turn to the prayer of Jabez: there might be a sermon made on each petition; but we must content ourselves with a brief comment on the successive requests. Yet we ought not to examine the prayer without pausing to observe to whom it is addressed. It is not stated that Jabez called on God, but on "the God of Israel;" and, unimportant as this may seem on a cursory glance, it is a particular which, duly pondered, will be found full of beauty and interest.

There are few things more significant than the difference in the manner in which God is addressed by saints under the old and under the new dispensation. Patriarchs pray to God as the God of their fathers; Apostles pray to Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In both forms of address there is an intimation of the same fact, that we need something to encourage us in approaching unto God; that, exposed as we are to his just wrath for our sins, we can have no confidence in speaking to Him as to absolute Deity. There must be something to lean upon, some plea to urge, otherwise we can but shrink from the presence of One so awful in his glorious-

ness; our lips must be sealed; for what can it avail that corrupt creatures should ask mercies from a Being, all whose attributes pledge Him to the pouring on them vengeance? They may tell you that prayer is the voice of nature—but it is of nature in utter ignorance of itself and of God. The savage offers his petitions to the unknown spirit of the mountain or the flood; yes—to the unknown spirit: let the savage be better informed as to what God is, let him be also taught as to what himself is, and he will be more disposed to the silence of despair than to the importunity of supplication. We must, then, have some title with which to address God—some title which, interfering not with his majesty or his mysteriousness, may yet place Him under a character which shall give hope to the sinful as they prostrate themselves before Him. We need not say, that, under the Gospel dispensation, this title should be that which is used by St. Paul, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Having such a Mediator through whom to approach, there is no poor supplicant who may not come with boldness to the mercy seat. But under earlier dispensations, when the mediatorial office was but imperfectly made known, men had to seize on other pleas and encouragements; and then it was a great thing, that they could address God, as you continually find Him addressed, as the God of Israel, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. The title assured them that God was ready to hear prayer, and to answer it.

They went before God, thronged, as it were, with remembrances of mercies bestowed, deliverances vouchsafed, evils averted: how could they fear that God was too great to be addressed, too occupied to reply, or too stern to show kindness, when they bore in mind how He had shielded their parents, hearkened to their cry, and proved Himself unto them “a very present help” in all time of trouble?

Ah, and though under the new dispensation, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” be the great character under which God should be addressed by us in prayer, there is no need for our altogether dropping the title, the God of our fathers. It might often do much to cheer a sorrowful heart and to encourage a timid, to address God as the God of our fathers. The God in whom my parents trusted, the God who heard my parents’ cries, the God who supplied my parents’ wants—oh, there is many a poor wanderer who would be more encouraged, and more admonished, through such a remembrance of God as this, than through all the definitions of a rigid theology. There are some here—the mother did not, indeed, give them the name Jabez at their birth; she looked on them hopefully, with eyes brimful of gladness; but they have since sorely wrung the hearts of their parents—disobedient, dissipated, thankless, that sharper thing, it is said, than the tooth of the serpent. There are some such here; some who helped to bring down a father’s “grey hairs with sorrow to the grave:” others, whose parents still survive; but if you could

look in unexpectedly on those parents, you might often find them shedding scalding tears, shedding them on account of a child who is to them a Jabez, as causing only grief, whatever brighter name they gave him amid the hopes and promises of baptism. We speak to those of you whose consciences bear witness, that their parents would have predicted but truth had they named them Jabez, that is, sorrowful. We want to bring you to begin the new year with resolutions of amendment and vows of better things. But resolutions and vows are worth nothing, except as made in God's strength and dependence on his grace. And therefore must you pray to God: it were vain to hope any thing from you unless you will give yourselves to prayer. But how shall you address God, the God whom you have neglected, the God whom you have provoked, the God of whom you might justly fear, that He is too high, too holy, and too just, to receive petitions from such as yourselves? Oh, we might give you lofty titles, but they would only bewilder you; we might define Him by his magnificent attributes, but they would rather terrify than encourage you. But it may soften, and at the same time strengthen you; it may aid your contrition, wring from you tears, and yet fill you with hope, to go before God with all the imagery around you of the home of your childhood, the mind's eye arraying the reverend forms of those who gave you birth, as they kneel down in anguish, and cry unto the Lord—ay, cry on your behalf, and cry not

in vain ; for it may be in answer to their prayer, that you now attempt to pray. Oh, we shall indeed hope for you, ye wanderers, ye prodigals, if, when ye go hence, ye will seek the solitude of your chambers and fall upon your knees, and, allowing memory to do its office, however painful and reproachful, address God, as Jabez addressed Him, as the God of Israel, the God of your parents.

And what did Jabez pray for? for great things—great, if you suppose him to have spoken only as an heir of the temporal Canaan, greater, if you ascribe to him acquaintance with the mercies of redemption. “Oh, that thou wouldest bless me indeed!” Lay the emphasis on that word “indeed.” Many things pass for blessings which are not ; to as many more we deny, though we ought to give the character. There is a blessing in appearance which is not also a blessing in reality ; and conversely, the reality may exist where the appearance is wanting. The man in prosperity appears to have, the man in adversity to be without, a blessing—yet how often does God bless by withholding and withdrawing ! more frequently, it may be, than by giving and continuing. Therefore, “Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed.” Let me not have what looks like blessing, and perhaps is not, but what is blessing, however unlike it may appear. Let it come under any form, disappointment, tribulation, persecution, only “bless me indeed !” bless me, though it be with the rod. I will not prescribe the nature of the dealing ; deal with me as Thou wilt,

with the blow or with the balm, only "bless me indeed!"

And Jabez goes on, "That thou wouldest enlarge my coast." He probably speaks as one who had to win from the enemy his portion of the promised land. He knew that, as the Lord said to Joshua, "There remained yet very much land to be possessed:" it was not then necessarily as a man desirous of securing to himself a broader inheritance, it may have been as one who felt jealous that the idolater should still defile what God had set apart for his people, that he intreated the enlargement of his coast. And a Christian may use the same prayer; he, too, has to ask that his coast may be enlarged. Who amongst us has yet taken possession of one half the territory assigned him by God? Of course we are not speaking of the inheritance that is above, of share in the land whereof Canaan was the type, and which we cannot enter but by dying. But there is a present inheritance, "a land flowing with milk and with honey," which is ours in virtue of adoption into the family of God, but much of which we allow to remain unpossessed, through deficiency in diligence or in faith. Our privileges as Christians, as members of an apostolical church, as heirs of the kingdom of heaven, how are these practically undervalued, how little are they realized, how sluggishly appropriated! We remain—alas, we are contented to remain—in suspense as to our spiritual condition, in the enjoyment of but a fraction of the ministrations appointed

by the church, in low attainments, contracted views, and half-performed duties. What districts of unpossessed territory are there in the Bible! how much of that blessed book has been comparatively unexamined by us! We have our favourite parts, and give only an occasional and cursory notice to the rest. How little practical use do we make of God's promises! how slow is our progress in that humbleness of mind, that strength of faith, and that holiness of life, which are as much a present reward as an evidence of fitness for the society of heaven! What need then for the prayer, "Oh that thou wouldest enlarge my coast!" I would not be circumscribed in spiritual things. I would not live always within these narrow bounds. There are bright and glorious tracts beyond. I would know more of God, more of Christ, more of myself. I cannot be content to remain as I am, whilst there is so much to do, so much to learn, so much to enjoy. Oh for an enlargement of coast, that I may have a broader domain of Christian privilege, more eminences from which to catch glimpses of the fair rich land hereafter to be reached, and wider sphere in which to glorify God by devoting myself to his service. It is a righteous covetousness, this for an enlargement of coast; for he has done little, we might almost say nothing, in religion, who can be content with what he has done. It is a holy ambition, this which pants for an ampler territory. But are we only to pray? are we not also to struggle, for the enlargement of our coasts?

Indeed we are : observe how Jabez proceeds, "And that thine hand might be with me." He represents himself as arming for the enlargement of his coast, but as knowing all the while that "the battle is the Lord's." Be it thus with ourselves ; we will pray that, during the coming year, our coasts may be enlarged ; oh for more of those deep havens where the soul may anchor in still waters of comfort ! oh for a longer stretch of those sunny shores whereon the tree of life grows, and where angel visitants seem often to alight ! But, in order to this enlargement, let us give ourselves to closer study of the word, to a more diligent use of the ordinances of the Church, and to harder struggle with the flesh. Only let all be done with the practical consciousness that "except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it." This will be to arm ourselves, like Jabez, for the war, but, like Jabez, to expect success only so far as God's hand shall be with us.

There is one more petition in the prayer of him, who, named with a dark and inauspicious name, yet grew to be "more honourable than his brethren." "That thou wouldest keep me from evil that it may not grieve me." It is not an entreaty for actual exemption from evil—it were no pious wish to have no evil whatsoever in our portion : "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil ?" Jabez prayed not for the being kept from evil, but kept from the being grieved by evil. And there is a vast difference between the being visited

by evil, and grieved by evil. He is grieved by evil, who does not receive it meekly and submissively, as the chastisement of his heavenly Father. He is grieved by evil, whom evil injures, in place of benefits—which latter is always God's purpose in its permission or appointment. He is grieved by evil, whom it drives into sin, and to whom, therefore, it furnishes cause of bitter repentance.

You see, then, that Jabez showed great spiritual discernment in casting his prayer into this particular form. We too should pray, not absolutely that God would keep us from evil, but that He would so keep it from us, or us from it, that it may not grieve us. The coming year can hardly fail to bring with it its portion of trouble. There are individuals here who will have much to endure, whether in person, or family, or substance. It is scarcely assuming the place of the prophet, if I say that I see the funeral procession moving from some of your doors, and sorrow, under one shape or another, breaking like an armed man into many of your households. But if it were too much to hope that evil may not come, it is not too much to pray that evil may not grieve. Ah, if we knew approaching events, we should, perhaps, be ready to give the name Jabez to the year which has this day been born. And yet may this Jabez be more honourable than his brethren, a year of enlargement of our coasts, of greater acquisition in spiritual things, of growth in grace, of closer conformity to the image of Christ. It is not the tribulation with

which its days may be charged, which can prevent such result; nay, rather, it may only advance it. And it shall be this, if we but strive to cultivate that submissiveness of spirit, that firm confidence in the wisdom and goodness of the Lord, that disposition to count nothing really injurious but what injures the soul, yea, every thing profitable from which the soul may gain good, which may all be distinctly traced in the simple, comprehensive petition, "Oh that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me."

Now we have thus endeavoured to interweave with our subject-matter of discourse such reflections and observations as might be specially appropriate to a New Year's day. But there is one thing of which I had almost lost sight. I have to ask you for a New Year's day present, not indeed for myself, which I might hesitate to do, but for the poor, the sick, and the afflicted, in whose name I may beg, and have nothing to blush at, unless it were a refusal. Of all days in the year, this is peculiarly a day for "sending portions" to the distressed, sending them as a thank-offering for the many mercies with which the past year has been marked. And our long-established and long-tried District Society for visiting and relieving the poor of the neighbourhood, makes its annual appeal to you for the means of carrying on its benevolent work. It appeals to the regular congregation, as to those whose engine and instrument it especially is: it appeals also to strangers; for they who come

hither to join in our worship, may with all justice be asked to assist us in our charities. I need not dwell on the excellences of this society. I shall venture to say, that, through the kindness and zeal of our visiters, whom we can never sufficiently thank, but whom God will reward—for theirs is the fine Christian benevolence, the benevolence which gives time, the benevolence which gives labour, the benevolence which seeks no showy stage, no public scene, but is content to ply, patient and unobserved, in the hovels of poverty and at the bedside of sickness; I shall venture to say, that, through the kindness of these visiters, a vast deal is daily done towards alleviating sorrow, lightening distress, and bringing the pastor into contact with the sick and the erring of his flock. It were very easy to sketch many pictures which might incline you to be even more than commonly liberal in your New Year's day gift. But I shall attempt only one, and furnish nothing but the briefest outline even of that. There is a mother in yonder wretched and desolate room, who has but lately given birth to a boy; and there is no father to welcome him, for, only a few weeks back, half broken-hearted, she laid her husband in the grave. What shall she call that boy, thus born to her in the midst of wretchedness and anguish? Oh, by no cheerful name. She feels, as she bends over him, as if he were indeed the child of sorrow: so dreary is her state, so friendless, that, were it not for the strivings of that sweet and sacred thing, a mother's fond-

ness for her babe, she could almost wish him with his father in the grave, that he might not have to share her utter destitution. Left to herself, she could but, like the Jewish mother, call his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bare him with sorrow." But she is not left to herself: a kind voice bids her be of good cheer; a friendly hand brings her nourishment: she looks smilingly on her child, for she has been suddenly made to hear, and to taste of the loving-kindness of God, "the husband of the widow, and the father of the fatherless." Oh, what a change has passed over that lonely and wretched apartment; you will not ask through what instrumentality, but you will thank God that such an instrumentality is in active operation around you; you will do your best to keep up its efficiency. And as that suffering woman no longer thinks of calling her child Jabez, that is, Sorrowful, but rather wishes some title expressive of thanksgiving and hopefulness; you will so share her gladness as to feel how appropriately the organ's solemn swell now summons you to join in the doxology:—

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

THE END.

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