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SERMONS.

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SERMONS

ON

THE SEEN AND UNSEEN.

BY THE

✓
REV. E. CASWALL, M.A.

LATE PERPETUAL CURATE OF STRATFORD-SUB-CASTLE, WILTS.



“ We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen :
for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are
eternal.”

2 Cor. iv. 18.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Sermons will be found to bear for the most part upon one subject,—the influence of The Unseen upon the Christian.

As we walk along in the midst of this visible world, there is a depth of mystery surrounding us on all sides, of which we are too often forgetful. Christianity is that religion which teaches man his true position in the Universe both Visible and Invisible; and our highest interest lies in realising to ourselves what that position is. It is obvious that only so far as we succeed in doing so shall we be able to act on the true principles of the Unseen.

They tell us on all sides of a great conflict approaching between the Church and the World. Let us, then, prepare to meet it uninfluenced by ephemeral principles. Let us be ready to act by faith, and not by sight; bearing in mind our condition as beings of another system besides this which we see. Let us pray for ourselves and for one another in these difficult times, that we may “both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Amen.

Mudford, May 14, 1846.

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SERMON I.

THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

JOHN i. 14.

“The Word was made flesh.”

AT this season we are particularly called upon to consider that great Union of the Seen and Unseen, the mystery of the Holy Incarnation, by which is understood the first coming of Christ in the flesh. This doctrine, we may be assured, lies at the foundation of the Christian religion; and must therefore be a matter concerning which it is of the greatest consequence to us all to have a sound knowledge and a right faith.

Many Christians, it is to be feared, live all their lives long without ever coming to a proper belief in regard to this deep mystery; insomuch that on the bed of death, the clergyman often finds that then they have to be instructed in it, when it is too late. But, my brethren, we must ever remember, that, as Christians, we are bound to be always advancing in faith, in holiness, and

in the knowledge of God; and that ignorance in so great a fact as this of the Incarnation will be sufficient to convict us at the last day. For what does such ignorance shew? It shews that a person has been living in a careless manner, and without any deep thought concerning his Saviour. If he had been really anxious about his soul, he would long since have taken pains to learn the true doctrine on this awful subject,—Christ Himself declaring to us: “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.”¹

In the prophecies of the Old Testament it is clearly set forth that a Saviour was to be born into the world. Let us, then, to-day reflect upon the wonderful truth, that a Saviour has come into the world, and that this Saviour was, and is, God and man in one Person.

“The Word,” says St. John, “was made flesh.” In this sentence is summed up the doctrine of the Incarnation. Let us consider, first, who is here meant by the Word, of whom it is said that He was “made flesh.”

By the Word, then, is to be understood the Everlasting Son of the Father, who in other places of Holy Scripture is called the Wisdom of God, and the Power of God. For beyond all beginning, before any thing was made in creation, before the stars, before the sky, before the angels, the

¹ John xvii. 3.

Almighty Father had an Almighty Son. And from this Almighty Father and Almighty Son proceeded, from all eternity, an Almighty Spirit, God the Holy Ghost. The Father Eternal; the Son Eternal; the Holy Ghost Eternal; yet not three Eternals, but one Eternal. The Father Lord; the Son Lord; the Holy Ghost Lord; yet not three Lords, but one Lord.

Such is the nature of the Deity, as revealed to us in Holy Scripture, and as taught in the Catholic Church through all ages. Three Persons and One God; the Father God; the Son God; the Holy Ghost God: yet the Father not the same as the Son, nor the Son the same as the Holy Ghost, nor the Holy Ghost the same as the Father. And who is sufficient for these things? Doubtless we should be better able to understand this doctrine of the Holy Trinity, if we were not sinners. Doubtless the holy angels do understand it far beyond what we do. But all we are sinners, we have gone astray, our minds are darkened, and we belong to an order of fallen beings. Therefore the best of men have ever acknowledged their own weakness in this matter, and have been content in faith to adore equally Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; crying out, Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Yes, my brethren, and we too must ever re-

member in regard to the particular doctrine of the Incarnation, which we are now considering, that the Son was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. He Himself has declared to us, "Before Abraham was, I am."¹ He Himself speaks "of the glory which He had with the Father before the world was."² And St. John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."³ Neither was the Son or Word of God only with God in the beginning, but being Himself without beginning, and of the same Eternity with the Father, He is also the Maker of all created things. For all creation had its beginning from the divine Word, who in Scripture is expressly stated to have made the worlds. Thus, in the Psalms we read, "By the Word of God were the heavens made, and all the hosts of them by the breath of His mouth."⁴ And St. John says, "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made."⁵ And in the epistle to the Hebrews we read, as quoted from the Psalms, "But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the works of Thine hands."⁶ And not only were all material substances throughout all space made by the Word, or Son of God, but

¹ John viii. 58.

² John xvii. 5.

³ John i. 1.

⁴ Ps. xxxiii. 6.

⁵ John i. 3.

⁶ Heb. i. 10.

also all spirits and invisible existences, and mankind also. For St. Paul expressly declares, that “by Him were all things created, visible and invisible; whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers.”¹

We must, then, receive it as an undoubted truth, declared in Scripture, and set forth as the perpetual doctrine of the Holy Catholic Church, that the Father created the world by His eternal Son, and that this Son is the same as the Word, and was from all eternity in glory with the Father and with the Holy Ghost, a most pure Spirit, without body, parts, or passions, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the one only true God.

Such was the divine Word. Now listen to St. John: “The Word,” he says, “was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”² Having, therefore, considered who is meant by that term, the Word,—namely, the Everlasting Son of the Father, by whom all things were made, and who is Himself God,—let us go on to consider, what is meant by the statement, that “the Word was made flesh”—in what respect it was that the Everlasting Son of the Father became flesh. And we may be assured, as has been already said, that it is of the greatest consequence to every Christian to have a sound and clear faith with regard to this fact of the Incarnation; for, as the Athanasian creed declares, “it is necessary to everlasting salvation that we

¹ Colos. i. 16.

² John i. 14.

believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man: God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world."

When we hear, therefore, that the "Word was made flesh," we are to understand that the same divine Person who created all things, and who also created man, that most pure Spirit, the Everlasting Son, did at a certain time, at the will of His Father, suffer Himself to be conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, by the Holy Ghost, and be made human flesh: thereby joining Himself for ever to our nature. Who in due time being born, was seen in the form of a babe, in all things like unto us, save only without sin. And this babe grew up, and became a man; and the man was found to be like other men in outward appearance and inward reality, having a body and soul, being one who ate and drank, and slept and woke, as we do; one who could be joyful and who could weep, who could feel pleasure and who could feel pain, who was subject to cold and hunger, who increased in stature and in knowledge; insomuch that many who beheld Him thought Him to be a mere man like any of themselves, and nothing more. But as time went on, He, by His most holy life, by His most divine doc-

trine, by the fulfilment of all prophecies in Himself, by most wonderful miracles, finally, by His Resurrection from the dead and Ascension into Heaven, proved Himself to be not only man, but also God; one Person of two natures, uniting in Himself the nature of God and the nature of man, by taking of the manhood into God. What a marvellous truth is this, when we come to think upon it deeply! The Word was made flesh! God became man, at the same time not ceasing to be God! Can any thing be conceived more contrary to what, in the common order of nature, could ever have been foreseen? That God should become man! who could have imagined such a thing beforehand? and now that it has happened, how difficult it is to realize it in our minds; what earnestness, and faith, and deep meditation it requires to represent to ourselves this most wonderful truth! And who can enter into it or understand it, even in the least, by his own strength? For to feel this great truth requires a power in us beyond our own; and that power is the Holy Ghost, by whose operation in our hearts, coupled with great religious diligence on our own parts, we may hope to be able to embrace so profound a doctrine. For "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."¹

Very earnest, therefore, should we be, and very constant, in the practice of all religion, and much

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 3.

more pains should we take about it than most persons do, if we ever hope "to believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ." For to apprehend this doctrine with the intellect is but a small part of Christian knowledge. It is necessary also to receive it in the heart. And the Holy Ghost will reveal it in the hearts of those, and those only, who are really in earnest about their souls. To others it is a dead letter; but to those that receive it aright, to such it is life eternal.

Consider now the depth of humiliation which the Everlasting Word underwent when He became man. He who was pure Spirit became flesh. He who directs all things by His providence, and supplies the necessities of every creature, became Himself, as an infant, subject to want. He whose greatness is beyond all conception, took upon Him the lowliness of a babe. He who is beyond all space unmeasured in His boundless immensity, suffered Himself to be enclosed in a human frame. He who is Creator of all, became a creature. He who is Almighty, took upon Him our weakness. He who is all-glorious, took upon Him our dishonour. He who is All-Holy, bore our iniquities. He who is Lord of all, became servant of all. He who is Eternal, became a creature of time. He who is the Invisible became visible. He who is God, became man. He who is the Word, was made flesh.

Truly, the more we meditate upon this, the

more wonderful it will appear; and it will not seem a strange thing that so great an event should have been prophesied many thousand years beforehand, even from the beginning of the world. Neither will it seem strange that angels should have appeared at that birth. Neither will it seem strange that, when Jesus Christ, God and man, suffered on the cross a most bitter death, and poured out His precious blood, that death should have made a great difference to the whole world. For by His death He paid the penalty which was due for the sins of mankind; insomuch that "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."¹ Neither will it seem strange that, when He died and was buried, He did not, like us common men, remain in the grave, but did on the third day rise again from the dead. Neither will it seem strange that He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of God, and shall come again at the end of the world, to judge the quick and the dead.

We have seen, then, first, who is meant by the Word. We have seen, secondly, what is to be understood by that statement, "the Word was made flesh." Let us, thirdly, consider why it was that the Word was made flesh.

The true cause of so great an event is to be found in the exceeding love of God, and His great pity for mankind. "Herein is love, not that we

¹ John iii. 16.

loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”¹

To understand this, we must continually bear in mind, that mankind is a race of fallen beings clothed in flesh, subject by nature to eternal death and endless misery. We come of an evil stock. The first beginner of our race, from whom through our parents and forefathers we are descended, choosing of his own free will to follow Satan rather than God, became, by the sentence of God, from that moment a corrupt being, subject to sin, subject to Satan, and subject to death. Being corrupt himself, he could produce no other than a corrupt offspring; “for a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.”² The consequence of this is, that all human beings whatsoever are born into the world in a state of sin, subject to Satan and death, as was Adam. And we see as a fact, that all do sin, and that sin has a dreadful hold upon the world, and that Satan has immense power in it. And all being born in sin, all also, as sinners, naturally die. Some live longer and some shorter, but all men die in the end; which is a proof that all are sinners, and we also, for we also must die.

This then being, after the fall of Adam, the dreadful condition of man, for “in Adam all die,”³ and we, by being one with Adam, partake of his nature and of his fall,—this being the case, it pleased the infinite wisdom and justice and love

¹ 1 John iv. 10.

² Matt. vii. 17.

³ 1 Cor. xv. 22.

of God to devise a means by which a Satisfaction might be made for the sins of the world, and for the breaking of His holy law. And this Satisfaction,—for what cause we know not,—out of God’s wondrous mercy, was ordained to consist in nothing less than the precious blood of Christ. For this purpose the divine Word took upon Him human flesh, in the Virgin Mary, out of a particular race of mankind, chosen before of God, and offered up that flesh upon the cross as an Atoning Sacrifice. Then, rising from the dead on the third day, by death He overcame him that had the power of death, that is the Devil; and ascending into heaven, there perpetually intercedes in our nature for fallen man, even for every one of us.

Neither is this all. A method has been prepared in the everlasting wisdom and goodness of God, by which the fallen race of mankind, who by nature are one with Adam and heirs of his flesh, may become one with Christ, and through Christ sons of God. So fallen are we by nature, so sunk in sin, that of ourselves we cannot draw near to the infinite holiness of God; but now a way is open to man, through Christ, of “partaking of the Divine nature.”¹ We, who by nature “were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”² We, who by nature are one with Adam, by grace may become one with Christ and with God.

For this cause Christ took upon Him our flesh;

¹ 2 Pet. i. 4.

² Ephes. ii. 13.

not only to offer it up as a Sacrifice for us, well-pleasing to God; not only to be an example to us, that we might walk in His steps; not only in our nature to intercede for us; but also that as by nature we are one with Adam, so by grace we might become one with the divine Word, who has become a second Adam for our sakes; that as by nature we are born in sin, the children of wrath, so by another means we might be made children of grace and sons of God.

“God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.”¹ It is possible now for us, who by nature must have perished for ever, as being one with Adam, by the free gift of God to live eternally, as one with Christ, the second Adam. It is possible now, that as “in Adam all die, even so in Christ all may be made alive.”² It is possible for men to become members of the body of Christ, “of His flesh and of His bones,”³ and, as such, to partake of His own immortality.

Once already this has taken place to every one of those who now hear me. Once already he has been made a member of Christ. You will say, When was this? I reply, In your baptism. For “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.”⁴ Already you have been made members of that divine Head; “born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible.”⁵ This is the case with every

¹ 1 John v. 11.

² 1 Cor. xv. 22.

³ Ephes. v. 30.

⁴ 1 Cor. xii. 13.

⁵ 1 Peter i. 23.

one of us. God has been merciful to us, even in our infancy, when we knew it not. He has called us into a oneness with His dear Son, and, through His Son, with Himself.

Are we, therefore, since we have been baptized, certain to be saved? Most assuredly not. Rather, since we have been called into so high a state as to be members of Christ's body, "bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh," we must look to ourselves that we live up to that high calling, by the aid of the Holy Ghost Who is given unto us; otherwise we shall be punished so much the more severely. For "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."¹

God having "predestinated us unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to Himself,"² requires of us a life of faith; requires of us to die to the world, and to live unto Him; requires of us to be most diligent in prayer, in humility, in charity, in patience, in self-denial, and in every other good work; in all which He will assist us by His Holy Spirit, provided only we be in earnest. Oh, that we could so be! Then how many things would seem easy to us that now appear difficult! Then how much more time every day should we give up to religion! Then how much more would God give us His blessing! For "he that hath, to him shall be given."³ Then how should we grow day by day more and more into a oneness with our

¹ Luke xii. 48.

² Ephes. i. 5.

³ Mark iv. 25.

Saviour, and be closely knit up with Him! Then, in the Holy Communion, partaking of the body and blood of Christ, how increasingly should we dwell in Him, and He in us! we receiving of His immortality; He, by His own body and blood, preserving our souls and bodies unto life everlasting.

Alas, how weak is the faith of the best of us! and how little depth of religion is there in our lives! and how very brief is the time which we give up to the salvation of our souls! and how little do we follow the example of Christ's humility! and how unworthy do we shew ourselves of our high calling! and how very poor is our love of God and of Christ! And all because we are not so earnest about our souls as we might be, but suffer this world to fill up our thoughts.

May God give us a spirit of self-examination, that, bewailing our numerous frailties, follies, ignorances, and iniquities in thought, word, and action, we may look unto Him who is "the first and the last," "the author and finisher of our faith;" who is now our Advocate, and will one day be our Judge. May God grant that when He, who once came in our flesh in great humility, shall come a second time to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in His sight; who liveth and reigneth with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON II.

THE TWO ADAMS.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

1 COR. xv. 45.

“ The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit.”

THE fact of our own individual existence, that we are living souls, that we breathe, that we move, that we have our being, is a subject upon which men are occasionally led to reflect, and upon which when they do reflect, they are amazed and astonished. That but a short time ago not one of those who now hear me, existed at all; that now we are each of us taking a certain part in the affairs of the present generation of mankind; that in a few short years we shall have ceased to be in the world; and that our places will then be supplied by others now not born: all this is a mystery which our deepest thoughts cannot fathom, and the widest range of our reason cannot comprehend.

And if this fact of our merely being living souls is a mystery beyond our comprehension, how

much more a mystery, even to the best of Christians, is that spiritual life which is proceeding in those who are members of Christ, “who have been born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God!”¹

On searching, then, into ourselves, first as human beings, secondly as Christian beings, we find two lives proceeding within us, each a mystery in its kind: the first our natural life, which we have received through our parents from Adam; the second our spiritual life, which we possess in Christ as spiritual members of His body. And as these two lives are different in their nature, so are they different also in their origin. Our first life, which is natural and carnal, we commenced on that day when our mothers brought us into the world, as children of Adam. Our second life, which is spiritual, we commenced on the day of our baptism, wherein we were made, as our catechism expresses it, “members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.”

Further, as names are the signs of things, so we may observe, that the Church,—willing to draw the widest distinction between our natural life and our spiritual life, our natural birth and our spiritual birth, our first birth and our second birth,—gives us a new name at our baptism, a name not like that surname which we inherit naturally from our parents, but a Christian name, which the clergy-

¹ John i. 13.

man does not ask the parents to pronounce, but demands it of the godfathers and godmothers.

Now, it is not my purpose to inquire here, how it comes to pass that such vast numbers, who commenced a spiritual life at their baptism, fall away from the grace then given, and, as they grow up, quench the Holy Spirit and drop into deadly transgressions: rather at this season I would follow the words of our text, and direct your thoughts from our natural life, and from our spiritual life, to the origin of the one and the Author of the other,—to Adam, that living soul, our first forefather, from whom our natural life is derived; to Christ, that quickening Spirit, the second Adam, in whom exists our life which is spiritual.

Our text declares, that “the first Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit.” It will be my object this day to consider these two Adams, the fathers of our natural and of our spiritual life. These are the Two Beings, which, the more we look back into the dim distance of past generations, the more they come forward out of the multitudes of the millions who have lived and died, brightly and distinctly shewing themselves to our eyes (the second how far more brightly than the first!) as the two great visible beginnings, and fountains, and sources of all that is most wonderful, amazing, and important in the history of mankind. And well does it become us, at the present season, to

consider in what the greatness of each consists ; how much greater the second Adam is than the first ; in what particulars greater and more glorious.

First, then, we will contemplate the greatness of the first Adam, the parent under God, according to the flesh, of our natural life, and who “ was made a living soul.” And here, in the first place, surely it was no common greatness, no ordinary lot, to be the first created into the world, without father, without mother, made in the image of God, and called expressly, by St. Luke, the “ son of God.”¹ Surely it was no common greatness to be selected at the dawn of creation out of the infinite numbers of beings that were to be, and to receive the spark of life direct from God, and to be placed in a terrestrial Paradise, without sin and without death. Some persons are in the habit of regarding Adam as a being no greater or more wonderful than themselves : but let us grant to our first forefather his due honour. Let us confess that, if there were no other point in which he was great, yet that he infinitely exceeded ourselves in this point alone, namely, that we are the offspring of our fathers and mothers, but his father and his mother was God.

First, then, Adam was great as being the son of God : but, secondly, he was great also as being the parent of men.

¹ Luke iii. 38.

On examining into the mysterious fact of our own present existence, we find that, like Adam, we are all of us living souls ; all of us breathing, moving, individual beings. But how came we to be what we are, and what we shall soon cease to be ? Evidently we are so, because in the Providence of God we were so born ; and most evident it is that we, who live now, could not be what we are ; that we could not have been so born at all, but for the intermediate existence of a vast number of generations, between ourselves and the commencement of the human race. We know, for instance, that the present population of the world is about nine hundred millions, and that it has been gradually increasing from remote generations. We read of times in the history of our own island when it did not contain one-tenth part the number of its present inhabitants. As we trace history further and further back, first to the deluge, and then again up to Adam, we find the same law holding good, namely, the gradual decrease of the population of the world in proportion to the greater distance of time from the present hour. Like a large lake, which, as it dries up gradually by the heat of the sun, first leaves the surrounding creeks destitute of water, then retires towards its own centre, and decreases from its margin into less and less day by day ; till at last, leaving its ancient channels to harden under the burning rays, it has found its retreat, and coiled itself up in its own

native spring, the original source of its existence and the father of its being; so it is with the population of the world, viewed by the light of history. It decreases with the distance of time into less and less, shrinking up into a smaller number, from son to parent, and from that parent to his parent, and from him to his, and so on in succession, till at last coming to the first parent of all, who, as such, could have had no parents himself, we find him revealed to us in Adam, the parent-spring and original source of all former generations of men, and of the whole present population of the entire globe.

Now if this be not greatness, to be the progenitor of all the souls that ever have lived, or now live, or shall live through all ages, I know of nothing great in the history of mankind.

Adam, then, was great, you will remember, first, as being the son of God; secondly, as being the parent of all living souls. But there is still one further point in which, as I conceive, Adam was greater than in either of the two former. And yet I hardly know how to call it great; and certainly it was a greatness, of all human greatness the most unenviable: for who would choose the greatness of Adam, as son of God and parent of men, if, together with that greatness, he must also resemble Adam in possessing the terrible and fearful distinction of being the parent of sin, and the father of death to the whole race of men through all genera-

tions and all ages? He was created pure and spotless from his Maker's hand. He was created a stranger to death, so that death had no concern with him. He might have lived immortal, and have been the parent and forefather of sinless and immortal beings through all time. It was in his power to do as he pleased: but he chose evil rather than good; he chose death rather than life and immortality; he chose to obey Satan rather than God. Then came into operation the immutable law, that "sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death;"¹ that no unclean thing should have the power to give birth to what is clean; that no mortal should have power to give birth to what is immortal. Adam and Eve had become sinful, had become unclean, had become liable to death. Their children, as they were born, were necessarily of the same nature as the parents. "No corrupt tree bringeth forth good fruit."² Their children gave birth to children like themselves. The fountain was tainted at its head, and what could be expected of the lake which was derived from so impure a source? It must be impure too: it could be no otherwise. Thus sin and death were perpetuated from father to son, in every one born of the offspring of Adam. Sin and death, a sinful nature and a deathly existence, became the inheritance of every living soul born into the world, in all countries and all ages. From that time till

¹ James i. 15.

² Luke vi. 43.

now, man can do nothing good of himself. Death has become “bone of his bone;” sin has become “flesh of his flesh.” We ourselves, each one of us, possess the same evil nature; not less evil surely for having come down to us through so many evil generations. We ourselves, weighed down by the sins of Adam and our own, may cry out “to corruption, Thou art my father; to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister.”¹

Behold the awful triumph achieved over the human race by the Satanic ruler of the darkness of this world! Behold our state by nature, the children of the “first Adam, who was made a living soul!” Behold the result of the greatness of the first Adam — misery, sin, everlasting death, eternal condemnation, no power of turning to God, slavery to Satan, despair, destruction, in the bud of life the worm which cankers its bloom, in the grave the worm of corruption, in hell the worm which never dies!

Blessed, then, be God the Father Almighty, who sent into the world, as at this time, the second Adam to redeem us who were children of wrath, to make us heirs of everlasting life! His mercy did not forsake us; He pitied our lost estate; He sent His Son in the fulness of time; He sent Him to save those who but for Him were lost for ever; He sent Him to subdue Sin and Satan, to gain the victory over Hell and Death, that “since by man

¹ Job xvii. 14.

came death, by man might come the resurrection of the dead ;” that “ as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all might be made alive.”¹

“ God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”²

But now, secondly, let us observe more particularly the greatness of Him who is called by St. Paul in our text the Last Adam. We have seen the greatness of the first Adam ; let us now observe attentively how infinitely greater was the second ; and, believe me, this is a matter upon which it is of no little importance to have a sound belief ; for it is at the root of all true religion rightly to acknowledge the greatness and glory of our Saviour Christ, both God and man in one Person.

Now the real point and centre of the difference between the first Adam and the second is set forth in the text. We are there told that “ the first Adam was made a living soul ; the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit.” From this we learn that the first Adam, with all his greatness, consisted but of a soul and body, possessing a life like our own, and no more. Christ, on the other hand, had not only a living soul and body, but also a quickening Spirit ; that is to say, a Spirit which had the power of imparting Itself to other living souls and bodies, and quickening them, or making them spiritual and immortal, and heirs

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22.

² John iii. 16.

of an eternal kingdom. And this is a power which evidently lies beyond the reach of men. This is a power belonging to God, and to God only, "Who is over all, blessed for ever."

Keeping in mind, then, this distinction between a living soul and a quickening Spirit, let us now take up, one by one, those points in which we have shewn Adam to be great, and let us in each of these points observe how infinitely greater is Christ.

First, then, Adam was great as being the son of God. And is not Christ also the Son of God in a manner inconceivably more great and glorious? Adam the son of God was the creature of time; Christ the Son of God is Lord of Eternity. Adam was the son of God as being so created and made; Christ is the Son of God as being neither made nor created, but begotten; as being One with God, and coequal with the Father and the Holy Ghost, in the beginning before all worlds. Adam as the son of God had no power in himself; he was a dependent creature even in his best state, with no capacity of living or dying except as it was given him from above. Christ as the Son of God had power "to lay down His life," and power "to take it again,"¹ being Almighty in Himself, and "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come,"²

¹ John x. 17.

² Ephes. i. 21.

the Lord of life and glory, the Only-begotten of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.

But, secondly, I observed that Adam was great as being the parent of all mankind. True; but from whom was Adam himself derived, unless from Christ the Word of God, by whom all things were made? After all, then, that can be said of Adam's greatness as parent of mankind, it was not his own greatness; and not, therefore, to him do we owe even our natural existence, although he is called our first forefather. Nay, the same cause which created Adam supports us now from moment to moment; and if for an instant it were taken away, we should "die and turn again into our dust." And, at best, Adam is but the parent of our natural life, by which we have living souls. It is to Christ, the second Adam, we owe our life which is spiritual. Our natural life is short, is uncertain. Our spiritual life is eternal, is immortal. Our natural life is of the earth, earthy; our spiritual life is heavenly, and from Heaven, and in Heaven. And who is the parent of this spiritual life, but Christ, the second Adam, Who came not only that we might have life, "but that we might have it more abundantly;"¹ Who has not, like our natural first father Adam, died and passed away, but being, as was prophesied, the Everlasting Father, now and for ever dwells in all those who,

¹ John x. 10.

having been baptized into Him, believe in Him with a living faith ; who keep His commandments ; who follow His voice ; who have subdued the world and its lusts, and, by the help of God the Holy Ghost, are purifying themselves even as He is pure.

Thirdly and lastly, we remarked that there was a sort of fearful distinction attached to Adam in this, that by his guilt he brought into the world sin, and by sin death ; and having so done, transmitted the elements of a corrupt heart, and the seeds of temporal and eternal death, to all posterities for evermore.

Now here, again, and here chiefly, observe the infinite greatness of the second Adam. That sin and that death which Adam brought into the world, Christ came and destroyed. Nay, not only destroyed sin and death ; but through death destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the Devil : nay, not only destroyed these by His death, but, over and beyond this, restored again, in the place of these, through His Resurrection, more than Adam had lost ; restored into the world, instead of sin, Righteousness ; instead of death, the Resurrection from the dead ; instead of Satan, the power of the Holy Ghost, the third Person of the blessed Trinity, Who is mighty in operation, in turning men from their own lusts to serve the living God.

Henceforth, then, those of us who have been

baptized into Christ, and, having been so baptized, live in His love and in obedience to His commands, following the example of our Saviour Christ, and endeavouring to be made like unto Him, endeavouring to die unto sin and rise again unto righteousness,—such have “put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,”¹ and have “put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.” They are new creatures: as we read, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.”² They are a new creation. Their very bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost here, and shall be like to the glorious body of Christ hereafter. Here they bear the image of the first man, Adam, which is “of the earth, earthy;” there they shall bear the image of the second man, Christ, “who is the Lord from heaven.”³

O glorious hour! O transcendent bliss! surpassing all that eye hath seen, or ear hath heard! O happy birthday from the womb of the grave, into the everlasting life of Paradise! when He in whom now, not seeing, we believe, shall come again in His glory, with His holy Angels, and take us to Himself, to be with Him for ever and ever! Then indeed shall we perceive and acknowledge the wonderful might and power of the second Adam, when, raised by His quickening Spirit at the Resurrection of the dead, this natural body which we

¹ Ephes. iv. 22.

² 2 Cor. v. 17.

³ 1 Cor. xv. 47.

now have, subject to disease, and sin, and death, shall have become spiritual, shall have become heavenly and fit for heaven. Then indeed shall we begin to know the exceeding glory of Christ, when, glorified by His eternal Spirit, this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, this mortal shall have put on immortality.

In the mean while, that we may attain to so blessed a condition, let us labour and struggle as becomes those who are aiming after that which is not the ordinary lot of all men, but the glorious prize of a few. Let us remember, "that narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."¹ Let us not become "weary in well doing;" but let us pray that we may have power to persevere to the end. Let us remember, let us bear in mind, that as Adam was, so are we; that the same evil nature which he bequeathed to the human race remains in ourselves, even though we be regenerated; that more temptations to evil surround us than surrounded Adam; that Satan, who tempted him, remains still the same tempter that he ever was, invisibly enticing us to deeds of sin and forgetfulness of our Maker. Let us not lose sight of these facts. Let us understand clearly, that if Adam, in his first estate of purity and innocence, sinned from that purity and fell from that innocence, and, in place of being the son of God, made himself the slave of Hell, and

¹ Matt. vii. 14.

Satan, and Death, and but for Christ must, with all his posterity, have so abided for ever,—if this was the case with Adam, who was formed in purity and innocence, then how ought we to fear; with what trembling ought we to work out our salvation, who are formed not in the likeness of Adam's innocence in which God created him, but in the likeness of that sinful nature which he obtained for himself!

My brethren, this is an awful consideration. We come to church; we attend the Holy Communion of Christ's Body and Blood; we humble ourselves before our God; we pray for His grace; we confess to Him our sins; we strive, it may be, after greater holiness and a more earnest religious life; but all the while we bear within us unseen, in the very constitution of our own being, an enemy to our spiritual life, which, without increased watchfulness on our parts, is able to poison the whole of our future immortality. And this enemy, the flesh, is not alone, but is aided and assisted by Satan on the one hand, and the World on the other. Satan by himself was sufficient to destroy Adam, although created in innocence. Satan, the World, and the Flesh, all three together, are arrayed against us, who were born in sin.

Oh, let the best of us fear, lest he be deluded by the deceitfulness of sin! Oh, let the best of us watch, lest he fall into temptation! Oh, let the best of us be afraid, "lest, a promise having been

left us of entering into rest, we should seem to come short of it.”¹

But, coupled with this holy trembling, let us never forget, that in the second Adam we have an eternal Protector, who was not like the first, tempted and thereby fell, but being tempted overcame, and “having been tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted.”² He will bear up those who believe in Him, and do not trust in themselves, provided they obey His commandments, and walk by that light which He gives. His arm is mighty to save. He knows our secret endeavours, which the world cannot see. Let us “be faithful unto death, and He will give” us “a crown of life.”³ “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”⁴

¹ Heb. iv. 1.

² Heb. ii. 18.

³ Rev. ii. 10.

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 56.

SERMON III.

CHRIST'S ETERNITY.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

JOHN viii. 12.

“ Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world : he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

IN the chapter from which our text is taken, our Lord declares to us, in His own gracious words, many things concerning Himself, by which we may understand in part who and what He is. Let us consider these sayings one by one.

First, then, at the twelfth verse you hear what our Saviour says of Himself, namely, that He is the light of the world. “ I am the light of the world : he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” By nature, let us be certain, “ we all walk in darkness.” That is to say, by nature our souls are ignorant, and dark, and blind, and know nothing rightly concerning God or concerning themselves. This is the real natural condition of the whole world. You will ask, How came it to be so? I answer,

Through the fall of Adam, when he yielded to the temptation of Satan, and ate of the forbidden tree. Then it was that his nature, which at first was made pure, became evil and corrupt. And our souls and bodies are like unto his, and partake of his fall, inasmuch as by nature we are descended from him.

By nature, then, we are in darkness. But what saith our Saviour? "I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness." Jesus Christ came to be the second Adam. As by the first Adam came darkness, so by the second Adam comes light into the world. And those who follow Christ shall no longer walk in darkness, that is, in ignorance and sin, but "shall have the light of life;" not light only, but "the light of life." What a promise is here! And we may be assured that so far as any one amongst us now, or any other in former ages of the world, has ever had the least light in him, it has not come from himself, but from Christ. And whosoever will follow Christ shall obtain more light and yet more, from Him; for "he that hath, to him shall be given."¹ And as "to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent, is life eternal;"² so this very knowledge comes from Christ, through the Holy Ghost, and must be sought from Him. For other fountain of light there is none to the soul of man, save Christ, the

¹ Mark iv. 25.

² John xvii. 3.

real Light of the world, "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."¹

Now let us go on to another saying of Christ concerning Himself in the same chapter. Look, then, to the sixteenth verse, and observe what our Saviour declares. "I am not alone," He says, "but I and the Father that sent Me." When we say that Christ is the only Light of the world, we must not think that He exists alone in Himself, and without Another. Christ is "the everlasting Son of the Father." He is "God of God." That Light which He is, He is so, not as Light in Himself only, but as "Light of Light." And there is also a Third, the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son. Therefore here also the Son declares concerning Himself, "I am not alone, but I and the Father;" for from all eternity He hath been One with the Father through the Holy Ghost. As in another place He says, "I and My Father are One."² Not that the Son is the same as the Father, for He is One Person, and the Father Another; but as he Himself says, "Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me."³ And here again He says, "I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me." For even when sent by the Father He was still with the Father, and the Father with Him. Oh, what a mystery is this! And when He says, "the Father sent Me," if we would un-

¹ John i. 9.

² John x. 30.

³ John xiv. 11.

derstand this sending aright, we must keep in mind, that the Father has, if we may so say, twice sent the Son. First, He sent the Son to create all things, in the beginning. Secondly, He sent the Son to "become flesh for our salvation." Accordingly, we read, first, that "the world was made by Him;" secondly, that "He was made flesh" and came into the world.¹

Now, again, turn to the twenty-third verse, and see what words Jesus spake in the temple concerning Himself, while addressing the unbelieving Jews. "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world." Ye are from beneath! And are not all of us from beneath also? "The first Man is of the earth, earthy;"² and so are all we who are born of him. We are from beneath. The body of the first-formed of our race was made from the dust of the earth, and we are formed from him. Christ, on the other hand, is from above. He came from above, and took into Himself that which was from beneath, even our flesh, being "conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary." Before we appeared in this world, which is beneath, we in no manner could be said to exist. But Christ, before He was born of the Virgin Mary, was above, that is, in Heaven with the Father. And He came from above, from His own Eternity, that He might be born for our sakes in time. And observe, He

¹ John i. 10, 14.

² 1 Cor. xv. 47.

says, not only, "ye are from beneath, I am from above;" but also, "ye are of this world, I am not of this world." Ye are of this world! How true is this! Were we not altogether formed from the dust of this world at the first, and do we not turn to dust again at the last? And to how many of us, alas, is not this world, all through our lives, all in all! Christ, on the other hand, is not of this world. How could He be of this world, seeing that He Himself made this world? For "the world was made by Him." He who made it could not be of it. For He was God before the world was, and so is He now, and will be for ever.

And now observe what He further declares concerning Himself at the twenty-fourth verse. "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." He had before said, "I go My way, and ye shall seek Me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come." But what means that expression, "ye shall die in your sins, if ye believe not that I am He?" Surely, my brethren, these are the very words of our blessed Saviour, teaching us the absolute necessity of having a true faith in Him. To die in our sins is to die with the guilt of our sins upon us. And whosoever shall so die cannot be saved. Wherefore He says to unbelievers, "whither I go, ye cannot come." Now, how shall a man escape from the guilt of his sins, so as not to die in them? By leaving off his sins betimes, being persuaded thereto by a

true repentance. And how shall he truly repent except he believe in Christ? To believe, then, in Christ is absolutely necessary for our eternal salvation. And this, not a light belief, not a mere saying, "we believe;" but a real belief, springing up from the heart. And observe, our Saviour says, "Except ye believe that I am He;" that is, that I am the Son of the Father. You see, then, that it is not a mere matter of words, when we speak concerning the Father and the Son, and their difference and oneness; but it lies at the root of religion. For how can we glorify the Father as we ought, and as He requires of us, and how can we rightly glorify the Son, and how can we rightly glorify the Holy Ghost, unless, by taking pains, by thought, by prayer, by meditation, we endeavour to understand the true doctrine concerning each, and concerning the Office which each divine Person in the eternal Trinity has taken upon Himself in the salvation of man?

Now, again, let us turn to the forty-second verse, and what do we read? "If God were your Father," says our Saviour to the Jews, "ye would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of Myself, but He sent Me." Here, again, our Lord declares that He doth nothing of Himself; that even He came not into the world of Himself alone, but that the Father sent Him. And if you ask, "Why did God the Father send His Son into the world?" has not the Son Him-

self told us? namely, that He might "give His flesh for the life of the world;"¹ that He might offer that sinless Body upon the Cross as an Atonement for the sins of the world; that by His death He might overcome "him that had the power of death;" that by His resurrection He might open to us the gate of everlasting life, shut since Adam's fall; and that by union with that same flesh deified and ascended in Him, we might, through the holy sacraments, become "partakers of the Divine nature."

And ought we not for these things to love Him? Hearken to what He Himself says at this very verse: "If God were your Father, ye would love Me: for I proceeded forth and came from God." If we be truly the children of God, which we were made at our baptism, and if we have not forfeited that state by our sins, then we shall certainly love Jesus Christ, and desire to love Him more and more. And if we love Him not, we may be certain that there is something very wrong in us. For the Holy Ghost will teach us to love Christ, and would have taught us long since, if we had hearkened to Him. If, therefore, our conscience tells us that we do not love Christ, we may be assured it is because by our sins we have grieved the Holy Ghost, and have caused Him to withdraw from us, and have not repented as we ought. And with how many is this the case! How many are there who would not

¹ John vi. 51.

even dare to say of themselves that they love Christ; who are not even conscious in their minds of any feeling of love towards Him! Yet, if we could but love Christ, hear what He Himself says concerning the blessedness of such a person's state: "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."¹ "He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him."²

And now, observe at the fifty-first verse what our Saviour further says concerning Himself: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death;" that is to say, let a man only love Christ and keep His commandments, and he shall never die eternally. Die, indeed, temporally, he must, and depart out of this life, for this is the lot of all men; but over such a one the "second death hath no power."³ Accordingly, in another place, Christ says of those who keep His sayings, that "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead—are equal unto the angels; neither can they die any more, being the children of the resurrection."⁴ Let us remember that there are two lives and two deaths—a life in this world, and a life in the world to come; a death in this world, and a death in the world to

¹ John xiv. 23.

² John xiv. 21.

³ Rev. xx. 6.

⁴ Luke xx. 35.

come. All men must pass through the death that is in this world ; but from the second death, from the death which is in the world to come, whosoever loves Christ and keeps His commandments shall be saved by the power of Christ. He shall never taste death. Immediately on his departing out of this life he shall begin to live with Christ, and cannot be said so much to die, as to depart into a new life. But he that loves not Christ, nor keeps His commandments, such a one not only shall taste death, but both whilst he is alive may be said to be already dead, and when he dies will have yet to die again after his resurrection, and by that second death will pass into a state of endless misery through all eternity.

So great is the benefit, you see, of loving Jesus and keeping His sayings, for he that does so "shall never see death,"¹ as our Saviour declares in His own most gracious words. And consider what a mighty power this shews there to be in Christ, how great a one He must be !

Thus the Jews, when Jesus declared this of Himself, feeling how great a power He took to Himself by such words, replied, " Now we know that Thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets ; and Thou sayest, If a man keep My saying, he shall never taste of death." In their unbelief, they could not understand how it was possible Christ should have so great a power. " Art Thou

¹ John viii. 51.

greater," they said, "than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest Thou Thyself?" Whom, indeed, did Christ make Himself to be but the Son of God, one far greater than Abraham and the prophets? But this the Jews could not believe Him to be. Their sins had hardened their hearts, and blinded them, so that "seeing they could not see, and hearing they could not understand."¹

But observe how our meek Saviour answered them, still maintaining at the same time His eternal Sonship from the Father. "Jesus answered, If I honour Myself, My honour is nothing: it is My Father that honoureth Me; of whom ye say, that He is your God: yet ye have not known Him; but I know Him: and if I should say, I know Him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know Him, and keep His saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham?"

They could not conceive how it was possible that Christ could ever have seen Abraham. They counted Him to be a mere man, and as such, felt it to be impossible that He, who was but thirty-two years old, could ever have beheld one who had already been dead nearly two thousand years!

But mark here particularly our Saviour's reply,

¹ Matt. xiii. 13.

at the fifty-eighth verse, "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." "Verily, verily:" these words signify the importance of what He was about to communicate, and call attention to it. "Before Abraham was, I am:" our Lord here expressly declares that He existed before Abraham; and how could this be, except in His divine nature? As Son of man He was but thirty-two years old; as Son of God, He was before Abraham was, yea, before the world was. He alone may be said to have existed before He was born. And observe particularly those words, "I am." "Before Abraham was, I AM." That expression is remarkable, because the very same words occur in Exodus on another solemn occasion. Moses had said unto God, "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them?" Now, what was the reply to this? "God said unto Moses, I am that I am: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you."¹ Thus, you see, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, here calls Himself by the name of "I AM;" and but now, in St. John, our Saviour, speaking of Himself as before Abraham, takes to Himself the same name. From which, it has ever been understood in the Church, that the God of Abraham,

¹ Exod. iii. 13.

Isaac, and Jacob, was God the Son, the same who afterwards was made flesh.

That, by these words of our Saviour, the Jews themselves understood Him to assert Himself to be God, is evident ; for we read further on, “ then took they up stones to cast at Him ;” that is to say, it was their purpose to put Him to death as a blasphemer. But Jesus, whose time was not yet come, hid Himself ; withdrew Himself, probably miraculously, from their eyesight : and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them ; their eyes, as it would seem, being holden so that they could not see Him.

You will have learned from all this, my brethren, what and who our Saviour really is ; namely, that He is Son of God and also Son of man in one Person ; that before the world was, He was in glory with the eternal Father and co-eternal Spirit ; that by Him the Father created the worlds ; that He also afterwards, coming down from heaven, became flesh for our sakes, and suffered for us upon the Cross. You will have seen that He came forth from God, and went to God. You will have seen that, whereas we are of this world, He was not of this world, yet, for our sakes, became of this world. You will have seen that if we keep His saying we shall never see death. You will have seen that He is the Light of the world, and that if we follow Him we shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

What remains, then, but that, considering these great truths most seriously, we should remember, that already we have been made one with the same blessed Saviour in our baptism; that as He took our flesh upon Him, so we have been made partakers of His; and that, as members of Him, we are called to the practice of a life such as His was.

Oh, that He Himself would give each of us grace to lay this to heart, and to consider that as He was born and died for our sakes, so for His sake we are bound to be continually seeking to glorify Him both in our life and in our death; that if we be but faithful to Him, He will be faithful to us; that if we deny Him, He will deny us; that if we willingly live in any one known sin, we are really denying Him; that we are bound to be continually improving in the knowledge and love of Him; that the Holy Ghost was given us for this end, that we might be perpetually advancing in holiness of life; and that if we have not driven Him from us, He is with us still.

May God give us all the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain that which He does promise, may He make us to love that which He does command, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON IV.

THE FIRST AND SECOND ADVENT.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Acts i. 10.

“ And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel ; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”

If there be any subject to which, at this season of the year, our attention is particularly directed by the Church, it is this, the first and second coming of Jesus Christ. I propose, then, this morning briefly to consider these two awful events, pointing out at the same time what connexion they have with ourselves, who are here met together.

Now the great difference between the first and second coming of Christ is shewn in the Collect for the first Sunday in Advent, namely, that at His first advent He came in the time of this mortal life to visit us in great humility ; but in His second advent He will come (this mortal life

of man being brought to a close) in glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead.

The first advent, then, of Christ is, you see, already past; the second advent is yet to be, when, as the two angels said to the Apostles, "that same Jesus whom they saw taken up into heaven, shall so come in like manner as they saw Him go into heaven."

Now consider these two Advents. In the first, as we have seen, Christ came in great humility. Consider the circumstances of this His humility. In what did it consist? Why, in this, that being in the form of God, and thinking it no robbery to be equal with God, He nevertheless "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."¹ That is to say, He, the Word of God, who was with God and was God, who, as He Himself saith of Himself, had glory with God before the world was, He by whom all things were made, did, in the fulness of time, come down from the infinite heaven into this world, His lower creation; and took into Himself a human body, being conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary: took into Himself a human body in such a complete manner, that from thenceforth He became perfect man as well as perfect God in one Person, the second Person of the Adorable Trinity. Now consider what a mystery was this! Try and bring

¹ Philip. ii. 6.

your mind to reflect upon the greatness of this Event. How does it come to pass that we think of it so little? Is it because we have heard of it so often? I am afraid this is too much the case. I suppose, that if a person had never been told of it before, he would be wonder-struck at it. But we, who have known it from our childhood, think little of it. We think little of the only-begotten Son of God taking upon Himself our nature; of the everlasting Son of the Father, when He took upon Him to deliver man, not abhorring the Virgin's womb. Few of us seriously enter into the meaning of it. Few know Christ as being what He is. Too many put up with notions obtained at random, and never truly seek to know Him. Few study the holy Scriptures earnestly with this view, that they may come to a real knowledge of Christ. Few read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them. Few, by patience and comfort of that holy Word, embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life given them in our Saviour Christ.

Hence, even the first coming of Christ is not so much meditated upon as it ought to be. People are busy with their different worldly occupations, and in the bustle of them do not try to enter into these things. The Humiliation of the Eternal Word does not seem to them to contain anything especially awful in it. They take it for granted, as they do other things. It is to them a matter

of course. Hence Christ is unknown to them in His real Attributes. But let it not be so with us. Let us not indulge ourselves in this vain and weak manner of treating the divine doctrines of our most holy faith. Let us seek more and more, by earnest study of the divine Word, by fervent prayer, by strict attention to the ordinances of religion, to obtain a knowledge of our glorious Saviour, so that we may worship Him "in spirit and in truth."

To this end let us particularly keep in mind the circumstances of His Birth, the wonderful miracles which He wrought, the prophecies which by His coming He fulfilled. And let us try to keep fast hold in our minds that, although it is nearly two thousand years since He came into the world to visit our race, this distance of time does not make His coming at all less real than if He had come but yesterday. To God "a thousand years are as one day."¹ It is not two days, then, in the sight of God since Christ was actually in the world.

And observe, it is said in the Collect that Christ came to visit us in great humility. To visit us! Not, you see, to stay; but as a visitant. Now a visitor is one who comes for a time, and then goes away again; and so did Christ. He was in the world but thirty-three years and a half. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him,

¹ 2 Peter iii. 8.

and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”¹ Such was His first coming. Though Creator, yet in the form of a creature. Though Lord of all, yet as servant of all. Though the Author of all happiness, yet to endure a life of all suffering. Though from all Eternity, yet to be born in time. Though a pure invisible Spirit, yet to take on Him our visible flesh, that in that flesh He might be crucified for our sins.

Now to enter into all this as we ought, requires much thought and serious reflection, and the whole bent of our minds. And this is what few bestow. Hence few are true believers. And although Christ has Himself said, “He that believeth not shall be damned,”² yet men are not alarmed on that account. So great is the evil of negligent and careless habits of religion, so powerful are they in strengthening the force of Satan and the world, and giving men over to darkness.

But, my brethren, that we may have a true wonder, dread, and reverence of our blessed Lord, it is proper not to confine our views to His first Advent, which is already past; but to look forward to His second Advent, which is yet to be, when “He shall come in power and great glory, to judge both the quick and dead.” Were it not for this second coming of Christ, we who live now should have doubtless some excuse for not thinking about His

¹ John i. 10.

² Mark xvi. 16.

first coming, regarding it as something in which we had no concern. But the undeniable truth is, that He is to come again.

Persons sometimes say to themselves, "What is it to me to read in the New Testament concerning Jesus Christ, who lived so long ago; or to be told about His Apostles, who are all dead long since; or, again, to be told of the prophecies and types pertaining to the Messiah in the Old Testament? What are all these things to me, who live now in a different age, and in a different part of the world?" Such, I say, is the feeling in the hearts of some persons. And others there are, who do not exactly think in this way, and yet they have a feeling of the same sort. That is to say, they think in their own mind, that it is foolish and unreasonable to meditate much upon events which took place so long ago as those circumstances which are recorded in the New Testament. The truth is, those circumstances and those events do not practically interest them. Now why is this? Why do they feel so little interest concerning these things? I will tell you. It is because they do not consider that they are mixed up in these very things themselves. True it is that Jesus Christ has long since departed out of this world, and gone to the Father. But equally true it is, that there is a time fixed when He will come again, and that "to be our judge." The scheme of human redemption is not yet finished. The Gospel is, as it were, but half completed. The first half is

past. The first coming of Christ is over; His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, —these indeed are over; but the other half is yet to come. That is to say, His coming again with His holy angels on the clouds of heaven, in power and great glory, “when every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him,”¹ when He shall come “like lightning shining from the East even unto the West.”² It is as though there were some great show or spectacle, of which the first half were over, and we, who live now, were waiting to see the other half. It is as though a master were gone into a far country, leaving his servants in charge of his household;³ and as if that master were not yet come back. Now it is plain that the servants whom that master left behind when he went, and not only those servants, but any others who in the course of his absence might be added to their number, that all these servants would have a great interest in their master. If, indeed, he were never expected to come back, they would not think of him so much. But even then those who were honest and well-disposed, and had loved him when he was present, would try to fulfil his wishes when absent. But if they were certain that he must come back, sooner or later, and that even the time of his coming, although unknown to them, was fixed, then they would be very anxious to be doing their duty, so that their lord, when he came, might find them well employed.

¹ Rev. i. 7.² Matt. xxiv. 27.³ Matt. xxv. 14.

Now this is the case with us. Our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, so far as His visible presence is concerned, has disappeared out of the world. But He is to come again, and He is to come for a special purpose; to judge us; to judge the quick and dead; to examine and weigh in the scales of infinite wisdom, how we have employed ourselves in His absence. Hence every thing that He did and said whilst He was in the world, every smallest circumstance of His life which is recorded, every duty which He has enjoined, is a practical matter of immeasurable consequence to us. We are mixed up in all these things. Not only because we, according to the will of God, have been born and live during the particular period which fills up the interval between the first and second advent of Christ, but further, because during His absence we have been made members of Him and of His family. Doubtless to heathens there is an excuse for their not thinking about the first or second coming of Christ, though it may be that even they are more concerned in these things than they suppose. But we have in baptism been made members of Christ. We Christians have been, in the predestination of the most high God, most wonderfully and especially interested in these matters. We are the especial household and family of Christ. Of us, then, when He comes again, He will take, both generally and individually, an especial account. And this we might expect, even if we had not been told. I say

we might expect, from the nature of the thing, that Christ coming to judgment would take an account, not only of all mankind, but in a particular manner of Christians. But, over and beyond this, Holy Scripture particularly assures us that such will be the case. It tells us that “unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.”¹ It tells us that Christians are to be diligent in all good works, especially in prayer; and that “so much the more as they see the day approaching.”² It tells us, again, that we should learn to be “looking forward to the glorious appearing of God our Saviour;”³ that to “those who look for Him, He shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation;”⁴ that “when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is; and that every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”⁵

You see, then, that in reality it is a practical matter of the greatest consequence to all of us to have a true knowledge concerning the words and actions of our divine Saviour, when He was in the world on His first advent, and to be living accordingly; for agreeably to what He commanded us then, shall we every one of us be judged at His second coming in power and great glory. At His first advent indeed, He came as a Saviour. But at His second advent He will come to be our Judge;

¹ Luke xii. 48.

² Heb. x. 25.

³ Tit. ii. 13.

⁴ Heb. ix. 28.

⁵ 1 John iii. 2, 3.

and a Judge how terrible! even a consuming fire, to those who have not truly repented and faithfully turned to Him in this life. And how many are there who have never done this! who really and actually live as if they were not at all mixed up in these things, as if they had no concern with them!

My friend, whoever you are, who continue living in this negligent manner, let me assure you, on the authority of the Word of God, that this carelessness, of itself, without any great positive crime, is enough to be your eternal condemnation. Christ, as your King and your God, claims of you worship, veneration, love; claims of you that your heart be given to Him in this life; that you be His faithful and true servant, and live as such,—not only mortifying all evil lusts, but also advancing unto perfection in faith, in hope, in charity, in love unfeigned, in all holiness. Now if you are not in this state at this present time; if you should die without having arrived at it, your salvation is impossible. It is expressly stated that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”¹ Christ, when He comes as a judge, must condemn you. There is no repentance in the grave. And in that state in which a man goes down into it, in that state will he come forth: the righteous unto life everlasting, the wicked unto torments eternal.

Oh, let us all dread so fearful an end! Let us flee for refuge to the hope set before us in the ever-

¹ Heb. xii. 14.

lasting Gospel. Therein, if we do but seek it in time, and not too late, we may find a strong consolation, and a sure anchor of the soul, which “entereth within the veil;”¹ that is to say, into heaven itself, whither Christ is gone before. “Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”² Yet a little while and, at any rate, our brief course will be over. But if we have lived a Christian life; if we have really, and from the heart, believed in Christ, our Saviour and our Judge; if we have actually made it the earnest effort of our lives to live according to His commands, in all things in which we possibly could, mourning over our weakness where we failed, but not ceasing our efforts nor casting away our confidence,—then great will be our reward, even “a crown of glory, that fadeth not away.”³ “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”⁴

¹ Heb. vi. 19.

² Heb. x. 37.

³ 1 Peter v. 4.

⁴ Rev. ii. 10.

SERMON V.

THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

LUKE ii. 10.

“ Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”

IT is a custom, founded in nature, and common amongst all nations, to observe every year those particular days on which any signal event, whether for good or evil, took place, — such, for instance, as the coronation of a sovereign, or some great battle ; and the same is the case with individuals. If any particular event has happened to a man, it generally comes to his mind with especial force at about the same time next year. Thus persons are fond of observing, more or less, what are called anniversaries ; as, for instance, the anniversaries of births and weddings in their own families.

Hence, too, it has come to pass that, although in Scripture there is no positive direction given to observe Christmas or Easter, or other festivals, yet from a very early period all Christians throughout the world have been accustomed to keep these

holy anniversaries ; and this naturally and with reason. For if it is right to keep any anniversaries at all—if it is right in any way to bring to our minds a yearly memorial of blessings received,—then certainly it is right for the Church to do so, in regard to those greatest of all blessings, which we owe to the Birth, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Saviour Christ.

Those, therefore, who do not observe Christmas-day, on the ground that it is not commanded to be observed in the Bible, surely lie under a great mistake ; for, not to mention that the principle of religious anniversaries is established in the Old Testament, we do many things which are not positively commanded in Holy Scripture, doing them naturally, that is, because nature and reason, even without the Bible, shew them to be right. And any person whose mind has not been very much perverted, must feel that it cannot be wrong, and must be right, to do all that lies in us, whether by anniversaries or otherwise, towards keeping up in our minds a remembrance of the great mysteries of our religion ; and that, if the world has its anniversaries, the Church should have its anniversaries too.

Now the proper intention of the religious anniversary or festival of Christmas is, that it should raise in our minds a spiritual joy, by the consideration of the great blessings conferred upon us through Christ's birth. And such joy is a duty,

a part of religious devotion, required of us by God. For since God would have us "to rejoice at all times heartily in the strength of our salvation,"¹ so, more particularly, are we bound to do so when the greatest cause of joy ever known to mortal man is brought to our recollection, as it is on this day.

"Behold," said the angel to the shepherds, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

Let us consider these words.

And, first, that word "Behold." Now the intention of this expression is, to shew that it was no ordinary matter reported in this angelic message, but indeed a most remarkable and marvelous event, well worthy the admiration and attention of mankind.

Next come the words, "I bring you good tidings." Here first consider who it is that says "*I* bring you good tidings:" "I," an angel; "I," a special messenger of God, purposely sent on this errand, that by the wonderfulness of my appearance you may be inclined to believe my message, and by the dignity of my nature to understand the importance of it." It is no common event that brings an angel visibly down from heaven. But on this occasion there was not this angel only, but a great multitude of the Heavenly Host with him. Moreover, the glory of the Lord shone round about. Now, for so wondrous a

¹ Ps. xciv. 1.

manifestation as this there must have been some great cause. For whether the glory of the Lord here spoken of was that same cloud of wonderful brightness, which of old rested over the ark of the covenant; or whether it was that pillar of fire again returned, which used to lead the Israelites by night, as the cloud by day; or whether it was the miraculous star seen near at hand, or some other unknown brightness in connexion with the manifestation of the Son of God (as that brightness which surrounded Him at His transfiguration, and that dazzling light which blinded St. Paul);—whatever this glory of the Lord may have been, there was, we may be sure, some wonderful meaning in its present appearance, together with a multitude of the Heavenly Host. And this should cause us to give so much the more heed to the words spoken by the angel.

“ I bring you good tidings,” said he, “ of great joy.” “ *Tidings*,” that is to say, “ *news*,” a thing which all men are eager after, like the Athenians of old, who “ spent their time in nothing else,” as we read in the Acts, “ but either to tell or hear some new thing.” And here indeed was news of a most wonderful sort, and brought by a most wonderful messenger. And this news, too, was good news. The very best news that ever was told from the beginning of the world. News of joy, and not only of joy, but of great joy. Good news! Joyful

¹ Acts xvii. 21.

news! Great news! And why great? Because it was tidings of the very greatest consequence that can be. Because it was tidings which the world had been anxiously waiting for during thousands of years; for which all creation had been groaning, since the first promise made to Eve, that "the Seed of the Woman should bruise the serpent's head."¹ The news which people mostly hear is about things in which, after all, they have little, and very often no concern, their fate being in no degree mixed up with them; and yet how anxious are many even about such news as this; how eager to be the first to hear it! On this occasion an angel brings us news which influences the destiny of every man born into the world; and yet many turn to it a deaf ear.

And whereas it is said, I bring "you" tidings of great joy, it is proper here to recollect who those persons were to whom these tidings were first brought, namely, shepherds. Not, you see, to the great or to the rich, or to the noble, was this news sent. Not to princes, or rabbies, or philosophers, or merchants, who at that time (for it was night) were reposing in their beds, or revelling at their banquets. Not to such did these angels appear, but to shepherds, men leading an innocent and humble life, employed in their honest vocations, undergoing toilsome labour and sore hardship; witness the open field, witness the cold

¹ Gen. iii. 15.

season, witness the dark night, in which they were found watching their sheep. And in this there seems to have been something significant; for, you know, David, whose son Christ is called, was himself a shepherd, and Christ names Himself as “the good Shepherd;”¹ and the Church of Christ is termed a fold in Scripture, and its members the sheep of the fold. It was not, then, without reason that shepherds were the first chosen to whom these good tidings should be brought; for in their very occupation they represented Christ’s kingdom. No doubt, also, but those particular shepherds to whom the angels appeared were good men, “who waited for the consolation of Israel.”² Perhaps, too, in their life out in the fields they had been accustomed to study and ponder the word of God, as revealed by His holy prophets; so that, when they heard the voice of the angel, although they were struck with fear, yet they did not receive the tidings like ignorant or unprepared listeners.

And now, again, as to these tidings themselves—these tidings of great joy. We may observe to whom, in particular, they were to be a cause of joy, namely, to all people. For the angel expressly said, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.” By which expression “to all people,” we are to understand, in the first place, to all the people of the

¹ John x. 14.

² Luke ii. 25.

Jews, God's ancient and peculiar people, in regard to whom Christ said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."¹ To that people, the Jews, I repeat, this joy did in the first place peculiarly belong. But, secondly, this joy belongs not only to the Israelites by birth, but to all also that are of the faith of Abraham. Christ was sent not only to be "the glory of His people Israel," but He was also made "a light of the Gentiles, to be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."² He was not only the "expectation of Israel," but He was also "the desire of all nations."³ He was destined indeed to "rule in Sion," but the "heathen" also "were given for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession."⁴ He was that Royal Person of whom the Psalmist sang, "Men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed."⁵

He was born, indeed, by nation a Jew, but by nature a man. Accordingly, although He calls Himself the Son of Abraham and of David, He likewise calls Himself the Son of man, and is, as such, brother to us all, as being partaker of the same flesh and blood. The Jews therefore, although the first, were not the only nation that had cause to feel joy at the birth of Christ. This joy surpasses all time, transcends all space;

¹ Matt. xv. 24.

² Acts xiii. 47.

³ Hag. ii. 7.

⁴ Ps. ii. 8.

⁵ Ps. lxxii. 17.

and therefore, even by Moses in the most ancient days, all nations were called to partake in it, where he says, "Rejoice, ye nations, with His people."¹ Hence, also, in anticipation of the call of the Gentiles, the Psalmist cries out, "The Lord reigneth: let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of isles be glad thereof."²

We are, then, you see, all of us concerned in these glad tidings, whence the duty of us all is to feel joy at this time, and diligently to consider the reason why we ought to feel it.

And this reason is given by the angel: "To you," he says, "is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Here is the true ground why we should feel joy at this time. Because, namely, on this day Christ our Lord and Saviour was born. And well would it be if we all did rejoice on this occasion truly, and from the heart, as tasting in our own souls the real benefits which we have obtained by the coming of Christ into the world. But it is to be feared there are too many who do not feel that joy which they ought, not entering in reality into the exceeding great privileges which they have received in Christ. And others there are who feel a joy at this time, but only a carnal, not a spiritual joy. Whereas the true joy which we should aim at obtaining in the thought of our Saviour's birth is the gift of the

¹ Deut. xxxii. 43.

² Ps. xcvi. 1.

Spirit, and to be sought from Him; for we read, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace."¹ And having so many and so great causes of such a joy, shall we not be very perverse if we neglect so pleasant a duty? Let us believe that religion is not all sadness. That although we are bound to feel sad at the remembrance of our sins, yet there are times, and that this is one of them, when, if ever, we should learn to rejoice in the Lord.

Of all the days that rise upon us, this undoubtedly is the chief, crowned by God's own hand with sovereign blessings. "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."² Let us call to mind those feelings of our childhood which we used to have at Christmas-time. Let us thank God that He has preserved us so long. Let us make resolutions to increase in His holy faith and fear. Let us remember that we are "come to an innumerable company of angels;"³ that in baptism we have been made the children of God, and heirs of His kingdom. Let us meditate on that holy heaven which is opened to us through Christ. Let us triumph in the thought of His great power and glory. Let us consider that we are joined with Him. Let us rejoice in God our Saviour; and that we may do so as we ought, let us from this time more and more seek to avoid all sins of thought, word, and deed, lest we fall from our state of salvation.

¹ Gal. v. 22.

² Ps. cxviii. 24.

³ Heb. xii. 22.

Let us remember the exceeding holiness and purity of Christ, born of the Virgin Mary. Let us reflect that we should strive to be like Him. Let us particularly avoid, at this holy season, having any companionship with those who profane it by revelries and drunkenness, and all manner of idleness and folly. Let us rather retire within ourselves and our own families; and in the enjoyment of domestic peace and tranquillity, and in the innocent pleasure which arises from meeting with relations and friends, let us secretly reflect on that eternal reunion of all that is holiest, and purest, and best, in those glorious mansions where sorrow and sighing are unknown.

While we joyfully meet those from whom we have been long parted, but who at this happy season are accustomed to cluster round the family-fireside, let us not forget, at the same time, such as, in the last year, and in former years, have been called away to their everlasting rest, by the great Disposer of human life. Let us meditate on our friends and relations who have departed in the Lord, and who still exist, though out of our sight. Let us call to mind their holy lives, their good examples, their pious ways, their blessed obedience; and, in the thought of them, let us rejoice; considering that, through Him who on this day was born, they with us, and we with them, may look forward with hope to a glorious resurrection unto life everlasting.

These things if we seriously lay to heart, this holy season will not have passed over us in vain. And, oh, may it be the happy choice of all here seriously to turn their thoughts to their eternal concerns at this time; to seek peace and to obtain it, even that peace which the world cannot give! May we all seek Christ while He is to be found, and not put off to another period that which should be done at once!

SERMON VI.

DISCERNING THE TIME.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

LUKE xii. 54.

“When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?”

IN these words our blessed Lord is pointing out a strange inconsistency, which was to be observed among the multitude of those who came to hear Him. And what He complained of in them was this, namely, that whereas in the natural things of the world they were very excellent judges of times and seasons, of causes and effects, just the contrary was the case with them in things spiritual. So far as the visible world of nature was concerned, the clouds and the rain, the heat and the cold, the calm and the storm, matters in which their own worldly interest was involved, in all such points they took pains by observation to ascertain, with the utmost degree of

possible certainty, the truth and falsity of things. But when the invisible objects of the world to come were brought before them, when He who spoke as never man spake presented to their minds those eternal and immutable truths which pertain to heaven and hell, death and judgment, sin and righteousness, Satan and God,—to all these points the people in general were absolutely indifferent. Nay, while He urged upon them the invaluable character of their present privileges, while He shewed them the exceeding preciousness of the opportunities which they now had, when the Lord of life and glory was Himself in His own Person amongst them ; while at first by glimpses He laid open to them the fate of their own city, Jerusalem, and at last prophesied plainly, that, if its people did not repent, it should be brought down and laid low with the dust,—even after hearing all this, and more than all this, even while they heard it all, they still continued to care for none of these things ; and would not perceive the value of the moments which were then passing away.

Therefore it was that our Saviour called them hypocrites ; that is to say, men whose life is spent in deceiving others and deceiving themselves. “Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth ; but how is it that ye do not discern this time ?”

Thus spoke our Lord. And the multitudes heard ; and there could be no mistake about what

He had said, no difficulty in understanding the meaning of it clearly enough for acting upon it, for repenting and turning to God. And now the words are spoken. The discourse is ended. Whither are the multitudes dispersed? They are gone, one to his farm, another to his merchandise. The impression of what they had heard vanishes from their minds. Perhaps they thought of it a little at the moment. Perhaps just at the time when the words were spoken they were struck with a certain indistinct feeling of the immensity of things unseen, of the inconceivable value of the present moment; but now that thought has all passed away. They return to the regular routine of the business of their lives. They forget the words of their Divine Instructor. They continue unrepentant. They remain in their sins. And what was the consequence—what was the consequence, I repeat,—of this conduct with the Jews of that day?

The time of repentance was lost to them for ever. That present time, in which they might have commenced working out their salvation; that present time, which, if spent in fasting and repentance, and tears, and ashes, might have saved their glorious city from destruction, and turned away from it the wrath of God; that present time, which they suffered to pass by without duly appreciating it,—became to them at last their own condemnation. Like some internal disease, which a man thoughtlessly suffers to creep on without attending to the

physician's advice, till at last it has got such a head that it cannot be healed by any art of man ; so it was with the Jews, while our Saviour was in the world. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."¹ Their wounds, their bruises, their corruptions, their putrifying sores, of which Isaiah speaks, were not brought to the great Physician, at the time when He was willing and ready to heal them. That day went by. God gave them, as a nation, no further opportunity. In due time, slow but certain, came the predicted consequences of their sins : their city was destroyed ; they themselves were slaughtered, on the walls and in the streets, by hundreds of thousands ; their beautiful temple was burned to the ground ; the few who remained of them were scattered to the four winds ; and their children's children, without a sacrifice, without a king, and without a country, still remain to us, living examples of the fearful vengeance which is sure to follow on those who disregard the accepted time, and despise the day of salvation.

And now, putting aside the case of the Jews for one with which we are more immediately concerned, is it not evident that the complaint which our Lord made of them might still with no less justice be made of many Christians in these days ? "How is it ye do not discern this present time ?" Such was our Lord's testimony against the Jews ;

¹ John i. 11.

and, if He were visibly on earth now, might He not well say the same of many amongst ourselves? And, mark, the question is expressive of astonishment. *How* is it? Not that our Lord, who knew all things, was ignorant of the real reason why the Jews of His time did not value, as they ought, the exceeding preciousness of their present opportunities. But it pleased Him to put His complaint in this form, expressive of astonishment, for our sakes; as though He would have said to the Jews then, as well as to us now: “O race, deceiving and self-deceived, what blindness has taken hold of you, that you cannot perceive the immense importance of the present moments, which you suffer idly to slip away out of your hands, instead of turning them to a religious account? Why will you not understand that the present time, and its present religious privileges and opportunities, small or great, which you are accustomed to neglect, are all teeming with amazing consequences which run beyond this life into eternity, and by which you must stand or fall in the day when every man shall be judged according to the works which he hath done, whether they were good, or whether they were evil?”

Certainly, my brethren, it is wonderful to see in how many thousand instances the events of life pass as clouds over men’s heads, and are not viewed in the light in which they were intended by God’s providence. Opportunities come and go,

rich with eternal salvation ; the grace of God is offered again and again, and with many to no purpose ; each opportunity is pushed aside, as though some other would be sure to come at some time or other of one's life. . Meanwhile life hurries on, death approaches, the time is unredeemed ; and many an unhappy being, after a thousand rejected opportunities of working out eternal salvation, sinks into the grave, and passes on to judgment, without faith, without repentance, without holiness ; there to meet, in vengeance and fury, the fiery wrath and indignation of his Lord and his God.

The great errors which persons make in religion arise commonly from their not seeing, and not being willing to see, the crises or turning-points of their lives. It may be, for instance, that at one particular time a person's mind has been softened by affliction, and the Holy Spirit of God has urged upon him the thought of that consolation and peace which is reserved for them that obey the Gospel of Christ. But did he at the time realise this important fact ? No ! He suffered the affliction to pass over in the natural course of things. He quenched the holy fire of the Spirit in a flood of unbelief. He did not discern the present time. The opportunity went by, and came not again.

Or, it may be, at one particular time of his life he felt an earnest wish to attend the Holy Commu-

nion ; that wish he was on the very point of acting upon, when some little scruple or engagement intervened, which would not have prevented him had he so chosen ; and what was the consequence ? the desire passed off, and never came again.

Or, it may be, that at one time of his life God's providence gave him an opportunity of making one or two truly religious friends, whose advice and example would have been of use to him, and might have saved him from grievous sins. There was nothing to prevent him from making these friends if he pleased. But he did not discern that time which was then present. He did not see its privileges. The opportunity passed off, and never returned.

Thus it is that, agreeably to the wonderful Providence of the Almighty, opportunities of entering upon a religious life are constantly being given to almost every individual, and some discern their time, and wisely seize upon it ; and others either cannot discern it, owing to the hardness of their hearts ; or, discerning it, let it pass by, on the idle supposition that they shall have plenty of fresh opportunities given them in life, not considering nor caring to understand, that "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."¹

And if we find it so difficult to discern the present time in the common events of our lives,

¹ James iv. 17.

suffering good opportunities of improving ourselves in religion to pass by and escape us; it is to be feared that this is also much more the case in regard to those seasons which the Church has sanctified for religious services. It is evident that Christmas, Lent, Easter, and other sacred seasons, were set apart by the Church for the sake of reminding Christians of great religious truths, and calling them to meditation upon them, with a view to their improvement in religion. But how little are such seasons really made use of for this purpose! How much are these valuable opportunities neglected!

For instance, we are now come to that part of the year which, from the earliest times, has been appointed by the Church for commemorating our Saviour's birth. One would expect, therefore, that amongst Christians this present season would not only publicly, but privately also, be set especially apart for a season of quiet and secret meditation upon that miracle of salvation which it commemorates. One would expect to find it cut out from the rest of the year, and made an especial season for prayer, reflection, and praise to God for His great love in sending His Only-begotten Son into the world.

But now observe how, in point of fact, this sacred season is really kept by the most part of mankind. It is kept indeed with joy, as it ought to be. But the joy which the many feel at Christ-

mas-tide comes, I am afraid, from no higher source than from the meeting of friends and relations, from the temporary relaxation of business, and from the customary festivities of the time. And God forbid we should condemn such joy in itself, which is doubtless right, and reasonable in its degree. But, my brethren, what the ministers of the Cross have to complain of, on their Saviour's behalf, is this, that in the midst of this right and reasonable joy they perceive so few traces of that higher, and more exalted, and more sanctified, and more purified, because more spiritual, joy, which becomes a Christian mind sensible of its inestimable privileges, obtained by Christ's Nativity in the flesh. Look at the world on the whole; look at that type of it which exists in any large town; look at those haunts of vice and profligacy which are now opened more wide than at any other season of the year; look, finally, into your own heart,—and then answer me candidly, is it not a truth that, if our Saviour were now in the world, He might justly exclaim, not less to us than to the Jews of old, in reference to our behaviour at this sacred season, “Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; how is it ye do not discern this time?”

We read in the second book of Kings, that when the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened, he beheld no longer the common face of the country as it appeared to others: but, “Behold, the moun-

tain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”¹

Now thus it is to the eye of faith as regards this blessed season of Christmas. The world in general beholds nothing whatever in it in the least different from other times. The world in general does not discern this anniversary of our Lord’s nativity. But let a man’s eyes be opened in faith, and the whole scene is altered. He then beholds invisible glories clustering round this time. He hears the song of multitudes of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Peace on earth, and good-will to men;” he sees the angel of the everlasting gospel flying in the midst of heaven, to preach to all nations, and tongues, and kindred, and people; he perceives, as it were, chariots of fire and horses of fire round about him; and, through the outward veil of natural and visible things, he beholds by faith that mysterious Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and “that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, and having the glory of God.”²

Oh, that all could be brought to see the same! Oh, that Christians would humble themselves more before God, and from the depth of that humility, look up and behold the exceeding glories which circle round this season! Oh, that all could discern this present time, which they now suffer heedlessly and unobservedly to pass by! Oh, that they would

¹ 2 Kings vi. 17.

² Rev. xxi. 10.

devote to serious meditation, and silent secret prayer, the few short hours, which, as I speak, pass away! Let not, I beseech you, this brief rest from the avocations of business, once more, as on former occasions, be spent after the manner of the world. Be sure the world is wrong. Like its own prince, it has been a deceiver from the beginning. Let not its joys be yours—noisy, tumultuous, and inconstant as itself. But if you would enter into the joy of your Lord hereafter, begin to rejoice in Him here.

So shall you obtain a quiet peace and an abiding confidence, which the world cannot give. So shall you be prepared to join in heaven with the angels who sing round the throne; and if this is the last Christmas that God intends allowing you to spend on earth (as who knows but it may be?), death shall be but the beginning of an eternal festival.

SERMON VII.

THE WISE MEN.

EPIPHANY.

MATTHEW ii. 2.

“ Where is He that is born King of the Jews ? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.”

IN a former discourse we saw how it pleased God to choose for the first messengers of the heavenly tidings of Christ's birth, not the rich or the noble of the earth, but some poor shepherds, men accustomed to a simple life, men of a humble class in human consideration, and but little versed in the philosophy of this world.

But now observe the wonderful Providence of God, who, willing that the two extreme limits of human society should meet together in testifying miraculously to the miraculous birth of the Saviour, chose, indeed, the first messengers of the glorious tidings from an uneducated order of men ; but then, to shew His great might and power, brought the second witnesses of our Lord's Ad-

vent from that land which had been the fountain of all the wisdom and philosophy of those days; selected them out of the very highest educated class existing in that land; and led them a long journey by miraculous means: and all this for the sole purpose, as it would appear, that they might give their witness to the birth of Christ; for no sooner had they seen Christ and worshipped Him than they departed again to their own country.

Thus poverty and wealth, ignorance and wisdom, joined hands together at this particular crisis of our Lord's coming; nay more, Jews and Gentiles, natives and foreigners, they of the West and they of the East, each party unacquainted with the movements of the other, united together in miraculously acknowledging the new-born Infant as their Prophet, their Priest, their King, and their God.

If you turn to the twenty-fourth chapter of the book of Numbers, and seventeenth verse, you will there find some remarkable words, spoken prophetically by Balaam, as he was inspired by the Most High God. These words were uttered fourteen hundred years before the coming of Christ. They were addressed, not to the Israelites, but to Balak, a king of one of the eastern countries: "I shall see Him, but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh. There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel."

If any thing were likely to make this prophecy sink into the minds of the eastern nations, it was this, that it spoke of a star which was to arise. "There shall come a Star out of Jacob." We all know that the people of the East, from the earliest ages, pursued astronomy as a science, in-somuch that at a very early period they were capable of predicting eclipses. It would not be surprising, then, if the prophecy concerning the Star of Jacob sank deep into their minds, coupled as that prophecy had been with an important era of their history. No wonder if it even found a place, not only in the traditions of the common people, but also in the writings of their historians, and the astronomical registers of their sages.

How often, as night came on in that cloudless clime, and star after star made its appearance on a sky clear beyond the conception of us who live in these northern parts of the world,—how often, at such times, would one of those eastern sages mount step by step some pyramid, whence he was accustomed to make his observations upon the heavenly bodies, and would there sit gazing and gazing into the depths of the firmament above, pondering the ancient prophecy, and searching in vain for any sign of the star of Jacob! His astronomical labours would be suspended for a while, as he thought upon the destinies of futurity. His scrolls of parchment, covered with figures and calculations, would drop from his hand, while, looking

up again and again into the serene quiet sky, he beheld only the old familiar stars of his childhood, and those continuing their motions just the same as from the beginning of creation.

Thus would the expectation of the new star be perpetuated from century to century; till, perhaps, the circumstances of the original prophecy were perished out of the recollections of men, and nothing remained but the prophecy itself, "I shall see Him, but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh. There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel."

This probably was the case in that very country of the East, whatever that country was, in which lived those magi, or wise men, whom St. Matthew records. By this time (as we learn from heathen historians of that age) a strong expectation was prevailing all over that part of the world, that a great king was soon to be born, who should rule over the whole earth. In this expectation, however arising, there can be little doubt but these wise men participated. And as their first question on reaching Jerusalem was, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews; for we have seen His star in the east?" we may with reason conclude, that through the help of some Jews resident in their own country, they had become acquainted with the leading features of the Old Testament prophecies respecting a Saviour, and

had learnt to connect them with the wondrous star, so long expected, so long delayed.

Nay, since God is no respecter of persons, “but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him;”¹ since these men in particular, as the representatives of the Gentile world, were the first to be admitted, in God’s providence, to worship the Saviour Christ,—a privilege which many kings had desired, but had not obtained,—who shall deny but already they possessed a saving knowledge of the Mediator to come, and were children, if not of the flesh, at least of the faith, of Abraham?

And now, as they are sitting, perhaps, on some house-top in their native clime, enjoying the breeze of the cool midnight, so pleasant in that sultry land, conversing together upon the star of Jacob and the sceptre of Israel, and wondering about the nature of this new Kingdom, which, in a mysterious manner, had of late grown to be so much a matter of expectation and reflection among the men of those days; gazing, too, occasionally with up-turned eyes upon the unnumbered hosts of heaven, which many of their countrymen still continued ignorantly to adore,—what is it they see? What bright object is that, which suddenly appears in the direction of Canaan; which, high up in the heavens, illuminates the far horizon, and sheds a lambent light over the land of Jacob? For a moment they

¹ Acts x. 35.

are wrapt in astonishment. They can do nothing. Meanwhile the light, as we may suppose, grows more distinct to their eyes, seeming to soar up from the far-distant Jerusalem. Others see it besides themselves; and doubtless the people collect in numbers to witness the novel spectacle. The ancient prophecy is remembered as though it were but a day old: "There shall come a star out of Jacob." How do the people shout and clap their hands! and others are terrified, and shriek and wail; and others walk silently to their homes, and, revolving the sorrowful denunciations of Balaam, mourn silently in their hearts, at what they conceive to betoken the approaching subjugation of their country.

And this state of things lasts, perhaps, for some days; and the bright star, too, continues to shine, and no evil comes. The people seeing this, return to their occupations as usual. They make up their minds to regard it as a phenomenon, which will depart as it came, according to some unknown law of nature. They no longer view it even with wonder. In a little while they scarce deign to look at it; and the very prophecy about it sinks back into obscurity and oblivion.

Now was the trial of faith for the wise men! Now was the time to see whether the Spirit of God was working in their hearts! How were they jeered and taunted, doubtless, by the faithless and perverse generation of those days, when they planned among

themselves to go to Jerusalem and inquire after this star—after Him who was born King of the Jews—Him of whom they had heard in the prophecies, and who, perhaps, had silently grown to be the food of their consolation, and the unknown end of their hopes, through many weary years! But, however much the world mocked and ridiculed them, we know that the soul which has once been led by the Holy Ghost to thirst for immortal streams is not easily turned aside. St. Paul has told us that “the whole creation groaned and travailed”¹ for the times of Christ; and whatever be the precise meaning of the expression, we may certainly apply the spirit of it to these wise men. No doubt they had long learned to feel suspicious of the religious systems which they beheld around them: they found in them no means of pardon and peace; they obtained from them no well-grounded hopes of forgiveness of former transgressions, or admission to future glory. It was for this their souls yearned and longed; for this they groaned, feeling the intense need of some infinite Atoning Sacrifice. And now that they had seen this wonderful star, this “light to lighten the Gentiles;” now that they had learnt even faintly and by glimpses, to connect it with the King of the Jews, and Him, again, with the long-expected Saviour, who, according to the Old Testament pro-

¹ Rom. viii. 22.

phacies, was to “bear their iniquities and carry their sorrows, and make intercession for their transgressions;”¹ now that they had learnt all this, and that their feelings about it had become stronger and more intense from gazing, night by night, on that miraculous body of light which seemed to woo them forward; now, at last, they are no longer able to resist. In spite of the scoffs and ridicule which we may suppose to have attended them on their entering upon so long, so tedious, and as it must have then appeared, so profitless a journey, they give up whatever stations they might be holding among the learned of their own land; they make ready for the perils of pathless deserts and roving plunderers, and set their face to Jerusalem.

It is probable that some time was spent in coming to this determination first, and making the necessary preparations afterwards; for we are told that, when they reached Jerusalem, Herod “inquired of them diligently at what time the star appeared;” and then afterwards, “that he slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.”² From this, we naturally infer that the star had made its appearance a considerable time before the wise men reached Jerusalem. Now of this period, if part was spent in the journey, part also must have been occupied in

¹ Is. liii.

² Matt. ii. 7.

deliberations and preparations. Nor, on this supposition of delay, let us blame the wise men for want of faith. True faith is calm, is deliberate, is well prepared. But when it does risk any thing, it risks all.

And, indeed, it could have been no common faith which led them even at this time, when they had seen nothing of the Saviour but his star, to store themselves, amongst other preparations, with gold and frankincense, and myrrh, as gifts for that King, that Priest, and that Prophet, all in one, whom, leaving every thing that was dear to them in their own land, they were going forth to find and worship. And these gifts, you will observe, were prepared with no ordinary care; for we read that “when they saw the Child, they *opened* their treasures.” Doubtless, before they set out on their journey, they procured some precious casket, and in that they deposited their triple gift, as became a present for a mighty king; and then commending themselves to the One true God, the God of the ancient prophecies, they went on their way; and the bright prophetic star shone before them, wading along through the heavens, as a living body; and it led them like the Israelites of old, shedding over them its soft rays, and whispering confidence in their new-born King.

And now, again, on their arrival at Jerusalem, observe how single-hearted their faith was, as described in the language of their own lips in the

text: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews; for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him." What a devoted simplicity of faith is this! "We have seen His star in the East, and are come"—to do what? Perhaps to inquire the name of this new King. No, more than that. Perhaps to find out whether the report may be true? No, more than that either. Perhaps to discover His political condition, and its probable effect on their own country. No! More, far more:—they had come to worship Him, and that simply and solely because they had seen His star in the East! Their faith, fired by the light of that star, or rather by that light of which that star was an emblem, leapt for once and for ever over all petty doubts, and scruples, and hesitations. All these it put aside as nothing, and came, in full integrity and oneness of heart, to fall down and worship that glorious King whom not seeing they believed.

And this has ever been the character of true faith from the time of Abraham himself,—purity, genuineness, simplicity, single-heartedness; what men of the world would be inclined almost to ridicule as childish credulity. This is that faith which St. Paul feared lest some of his converts might lose; namely, "the simplicity which is in Christ."¹ This is that faith which Christ Himself commends: "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."²

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 3.

² Matt. vi. 22.

And this simplicity of faith might perhaps be expected to be found in some degree in shepherds and men of little worldly wisdom ; but here, in the case of these wise men, we find it existing in perfection amidst all the learning and wisdom of that day. Nothing could be more intricate, more full of speculations, than those systems of philosophy under which they had probably been brought up ; no studies could have had a greater tendency to corrupt that childish simplicity of heart without which no man shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Yet these wise men, these magi, addicted doubtless to the same studies as the rest of their countrymen, no sooner just saw the star than, calmly and deliberately, and taking time for what they were doing, as became a serious and important event in their lives, they went in admirable integrity and singleness of faith to worship and fall down before One whom they had never seen and never known.

And these men were called wise from their proficiency in the wisdom of their own times, from their skill in the philosophy of their day, in the complicated arithmetical processes of that period, in the demonstrations of mathematical figures, in the science of the stars, in subtle disquisitions on the human soul, in logical and rhetorical questions, in the history of nature and the elements, in the history of animals and man, in the histories of former times and empires ; all this, or parts of this, or whatever it was that constituted the learning of

their countrymen, had no doubt been their study from childhood to youth, and from youth to manhood ; and on these accounts they are called wise. But who does not see another and a better reason why they may be called really and truly wise ?

Wise indeed they were in their human knowledge and learning, but wiser far, with a wisdom which is not of this world, when they brought all that knowledge and all that learning, the studies of their earlier youth, and the experience of their later years, and laid the whole down humbly and simply at the feet of their infant Saviour.

And though they brought gold, and though they brought frankincense, and though they brought myrrh, and though all these were doubtless in their kinds the most precious, the most excellent, gifts they could procure, yet was there one other unseemly offering which they brought with them, more pure than gold, more sweet-scented than frankincense, more precious than myrrh ; and this was the offering of a simple faith and a humble mind, and a holy heart, which resigns the wisdom of this world as foolishness with God.

If, then, in conclusion, there be any here, young or old, to whom it has been given that they should be educated to a farther extent than others ; who accordingly feel inclined to take pride to themselves for their advances in knowledge, and to think much and highly of what they have learnt,

and in what they excel ; let me urge upon them to bear in mind, and seriously consider, the history of these wise Gentiles, whom God fixed upon in His providence to be, after the shepherds, the second messengers of a new-born Saviour.

Let the young, in particular, shew true and real wisdom ; not indeed by neglecting their studies, for that would be sin of another kind, but by making a daily offering of them to their Lord and God. And this they may do, first, by turning them into a daily subject of prayer ; and secondly, by pursuing them in a Christian spirit, and with a view to spending their acquirements hereafter, according to their situations in life, to the honour and glory of Christ.

Thus, if they know little, that little shall be counted much with God, for His Son's sake. And if they know much, that much, being consecrated to God, shall become sanctified to themselves.

And may God the Holy Ghost so guide the hearts of us all, and direct them continually, that we may ever regard the mere wisdom of this world in itself as the deepest of human ignorance, and acknowledge the most ignorant in this world's wisdom to be truly wise, if they possess that wisdom which is from above. So that finally, when the world and its works and its wisdom shall melt away like a tale that is told, we may be found, if not like the wise men at the visible cradle of our Lord, at least clinging to His invisible Cross, which

alone shall be unshaken in that day, which alone shall be our stay or trust, through faith in Him, who for our sakes “became poor that we, through His poverty, might be rich;”¹ who for our sakes entered into the ignorant state of childhood, that we might be made in Him wise for evermore.

¹ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

SERMON VIII.

CHRIST'S MOTHER AND CHRISTIAN MOTHERS.

THE PURIFICATION.

LUKE ii. 34.

“ And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against. Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also.”

ON some future occasion we will hope to enter at length into the character and history of Simeon, dwelling particularly on that strange and wonderful position in which it pleased God to place him, when it was revealed to him by the Holy Ghost that “ he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.”

At present it is enough to observe, from the words of our text, that Simeon was not only a just and devout man, but was also a prophet; one of the first prophets, indeed, of whom we read in the New Testament. It was now four hundred years since the canon of the Old Testament had been closed in Malachi. Since that time the spirit of prophecy, after shining dimly for awhile

in the Apocrypha, had died away. The world had been left in darkness, waiting for the glory that should be revealed.

At last, with the birth of our Saviour, the same spirit woke up again from the sleep of centuries. It pleased the Almighty to signalise the coming of His Only-begotten into the world, not only by a host of miraculous displays, but also by a fresh outpouring of prophecies and revelations. St. John the Baptist, indeed, was born to be the prophet of the Highest, to be the messenger who was to go before Him and prepare His ways. But, long before St. John was of an age to enter on his ministry, there had appeared other prophets inferior to himself,—such as Zacharias, Anna, Simeon, Elisabeth. When the sun is on the point of rising, you may have observed that the skirts of the whole eastern horizon are fringed with a certain radiance that seems struggling to burst into the world. So it was with the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. Before Christ entered on His ministry, when He was yet an infant, and even before He was born, the harbingers of His rising were already to be found illuminating the night of the world; St. John, as the star of morn, and others, like Simeon, taking the place of those illuminated and parti-coloured clouds which curtain round the chambers of that glorious luminary which “rejoiceth as a giant to run his course.”

The prophecies of Simeon are two in number,

each of them separate and distinct from the other. The first respects the Child Jesus, whom he had in his arms; the second respects the future life of the blessed Virgin Mary. It is the second of these which I propose to consider on the present occasion. Leaving out, therefore, the prophecy respecting our Lord, "that He was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which should be spoken against," that respecting His blessed Mother will run thus: "And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his Mother, Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also."

Strange blessing this, one might say! "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul." Strange, incomprehensible, mysterious blessing! Or rather, it might be urged, how can it be called a blessing at all? Surely Simeon, in this instance, was to the Virgin Mary a prophet of evil rather than of good. Instead of blessing her, he seems to denounce upon her a curse. "A sword shall pierce through thy own soul." The very words are full of bitterness. He seems to reverse the conduct of Balaam. Balaam was asked to curse, and, instead of cursing, he blessed the Israelites with many blessings. Simeon comes to bless; and, lo! nearly the first words that he utters are a denunciation upon the Virgin Mother of piercing griefs and sorrows—sorrows piercing like a sword, sorrows piercing through the soul.

I repeat, my brethren, some persons might thus think of Simeon's prophecy; but I do not say that such persons would think right: God forbid. For Holy Scripture expressly tells us that Simeon blessed Mary. And God having thus declared it to us, we should be bound to believe that Mary was blessed in the words of Simeon, even though, to our own notions, it appeared just the contrary. However, what I would observe in this case is, that, in point of fact, Simeon's words do but exhibit, in the particular instance of the blessed Virgin, the same general course of Providence with which it pleases the Almighty universally to visit His children. It is a principle of Christianity, that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God."¹ This law has been fully declared in our Saviour's own words, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."² And again, in the Psalms, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."³

This, therefore, being the law of the Almighty in regard to the blessings of our eternal inheritance, namely, that in general they are to be obtained not without temporal sufferings, you will observe, that, in the first place, God did not depart from it even in respect to His Only-begotten Son when He was in the days of His flesh. Christ Himself entered not into joy, but first He suffered pain; Christ Himself went not up into His glory

¹ Acts xiv. 22.

² Matt. v. 4.

³ Ps. cxxvi. 6.

before He was crucified. The same law is to be seen in the histories of the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, whose days were “few and evil”¹ so far as this life is concerned; and still more clearly is it to be observed in the lives of the Apostles of our Lord, of whom, together with himself, St. Paul says, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”²

Let us not, then, wonder that, even in the case of the Virgin Mary, it pleased the Almighty Father not to depart from that general law of His providence, “Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.”³ She was pure; she was holy; she was Mother to the Eternal Son of the Father; she was to be felicitated as such by all generations;⁴ but all this must not interfere with the will of God, that human beings are to be “perfected through sufferings.” Accordingly, when Simeon blessed her, he gave her expressly to understand that this blessing was not to consist in her being free from temporal sorrows: rather that, in proportion to her greatness in being the chosen Mother of our Lord, so great were to be the sorrows of her life; to the end that, being chastened by the Almighty’s hand, so much the more glorious in the world to come might be her inheritance among them that are sanctified.

¹ Gen. xlvii. 9.

² 1 Cor. xv. 19.

³ Heb. xii. 6.

⁴ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μακαριοῦσί με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί, Luke i. 48.

Hence, when Simeon said, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul," it may be that, for a moment, Mary shrank in her heart at the thought of the sufferings which she was to endure, expressed in such fearful words; it may be, for a moment, she trembled, as, looking forward into the future years of her life, she perceived that, for the rest of her days, there must ever be this mysterious sword hanging, as it were, over her head, and ready at any time to pierce her to the soul. But then, again, when she reflected that She had been chosen to give birth to Him who was the hope of the ends of the world; to be the Woman predicted from the beginning whose Seed was to bruise the Serpent's head; when she considered that it was for His sake these sufferings were to be borne by her; then, no doubt, all apprehension at Simeon's fearful words would vanish into air; all sufferings, of all kinds, through all years, would seem a price too small compared with the blessings already received, and yet in store for her; and she would be ready to cry out with her whole heart, "Yes, let the sword pierce through my soul again and again, if it be the will of my God. What are sufferings, present or future, compared with the glory that shall be revealed? Let them come; let them be heaped over me; still, in the face of them all, my soul shall magnify the Lord, and my spirit shall rejoice in God my Saviour."

And now we might well pause here to shew how truly Simeon's words were fulfilled; what tears, what pains, what sorrows, actually became the lot of the Mother of our Lord in the later years of her life. She beheld her eternal Son, the Son of God and the Son of Man, scorned, blasphemed, rejected by His own countrymen, by all the world. We know the ordinary feelings of mothers at the sufferings of their children. How much more intense must have been those of the Virgin Mother at the sufferings of her Son and her Saviour! how much in His sufferings must she have suffered! how much in His afflictions must she have been afflicted! Thus her troubles would be increasing from year to year of our Lord's ministry, till at last they reached their climax on that fearful day of the crucifixion, which for a while quenched in darkness the light of the Gentiles, and trampled in dishonour the glory of Israel.

And all this we might go on to shew from the words of Scripture, which, wherever afterwards they speak of the Virgin Mary, indicate that her life was by no means what is commonly called a happy one in the usual sense of the term. But I prefer to pass from this subject to another, in which many now present are interested, and upon which, perhaps, they seldom reflect.

We have spoken of the Mother of our Lord; we have seen that her life was one of sufferings;

we have seen that these sufferings arose from her being the Mother of Christ ; we have seen that they had been prophesied to her many years before by Simeon ; we have seen that in them there was involved not a curse, but a blessing. Now, then, let us look from Mary, the Mother of Christ, to the case of Christian mothers in general ; and, if I mistake not, we shall find that God, in the particular course of His providence, does not deal with them otherwise than He dealt with Mary.

I mean to say, that it pleases the Almighty to visit many Christian mothers of these days with afflictions on account of their children ; and this, not intending it as a curse to them, but, if they will receive it so, as a blessing, even as Mary was blest.

This reflection is one which perhaps comes with greater force to us Christian ministers, because, in the service of baptism, we are placed very much in the same situation towards Christian mothers as Simeon was, at the purification, towards the Virgin. Then, like Simeon, we stand in the temple of God ; then, like Simeon, we take the child in our arms, —not the Child Jesus, but the child concerning whom we pray that he may grow up in the image of Jesus ; then we do for him after the custom of the law of Jesus ; and the mother, it may be, standing by, sees it all ; and, if she be a Christian indeed, will rejoice with exceeding joy at what is then done for her child.

Let her rejoice while she may. We are not prophets like Simeon, but yet, like him, we might say to her, upon an ordinary calculation of human life, “‘Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also.’ This child, or if not this one, some other—who knows but a time will come, when, from some cause or another, he shall be to thee a source of bitter sorrow? If thou have many children, this at least is sure to be the case with one or other of them; the experience of life being a witness.”

Either the child shall die in his very infancy; or he shall be allowed to live a few years, and during those years shall become entwined round his mother’s heart, and then die, and carry down a thousand pleasant hopes into the grave, leaving behind an emptiness which cannot be filled up. Or he shall live through childhood and boyhood, till he becomes a man; and in that life of his, his mother, in her great and unknown love, shall have lived over again her own life; and then he shall either be carried off by sudden disease in the bloom of his years, or he shall be separated from her for ever by thousands of miles; or, although at no great distance, he shall still be as effectually kept out of her sight by the compulsory circumstances of life; or, worse still, being near and at home, he shall lose that affection and love towards his mother which he once had; or, more bitter than all, he shall exhibit an open contempt

and disregard of her, and sometimes even a professed hostility against her. Or, if near her and loving her, still there may be a greater separation than any yet mentioned between them: the mother may be a Christian; the son may be an infidel, or at least irreligious, or careless and indifferent to religion. Or if all things are well with her in these respects, then there are a thousand other trials which beset a mother's happiness, and a Christian mother's most of all, because she values her children as immortal beings, and is very sensitive on some points where other mothers feel nothing at all. And at last, and at best, as years proceed, and new engagements are formed in life, and they who were children become in their turns fathers and mothers, then what pain, one would suppose, to a mother to find the love of her children transferred from herself, who is growing old, to others newly born; and to see the difference widening from year to year, till at last, as sometimes happens, after being turned over from one child to another, she is left alone in solitary widowhood, attended by the hands of strangers, and mourning in silence over those strong feelings of affection and love which she felt in the early days when she was first a mother, but which seem never to have been fully realised in life!

Now, God forbid I should say that this is the case with every mother. All that I would mean to observe is, that, in the providence of God, there

is stored up for most mothers, and especially for Christian mothers, some sorrow or other resulting in some way from their children; and this whether they are dutiful, or whether they are disobedient. And seldom has there been a son or daughter who, on the death of their mother, did not feel that they had caused her grief in more ways than one. And seldom was there a Christian mother who, although appearing happy in the eye of the world, did not possess some secret sorrows which even her children never knew.

And now to what purpose have I been dwelling at this length on a subject which, in truth, exhibits a melancholy view of human life? Simply on this account, that I may induce those Christian mothers, who now hear me, to console themselves with the thought, that in all their afflictions, if afflictions they have, they are but drinking of the same cup of which the Mother of their Lord, and their Lord Himself, drank before; that in all their troubles, they are but fulfilling that law of God which expressly declares, "whom He loveth He chasteneth."¹

To such I would advise thus; say to yourselves, "Shall the Mother of my Lord have undergone such trouble and suffering, and I expect to go free?" Remember that although Mary did suffer, still for all that she was blest. And shall not you too be blessed in all your trials, and all your troubles,

¹ Heb. xii. 6.

and all your anxieties, which are not sent in anger, but for the sake of purifying you, and preparing you for your eternal inheritance? Bear this in mind. Be earnest in your prayers for your children's sake. Do all that you can for them : first, that they may be religious ; secondly, that they may be happy.

But, as to all the rest, consider, and rejoice in considering, that you are in the hands of a merciful Father which is in heaven, and who will not lay upon you more than you can bear. He it is who sends every affliction for your good, to the end that no blessing may seem to you perfect in this world. On Him, then, let your soul rest. Look forward towards that world to come, in which your true treasure lies. And, above your children, love your Saviour here, that with them you may be partaker of His glory hereafter.

SERMON IX.

CHRIST UNCHANGEABLE.

ON THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR.

HEBREWS xiii. 8.

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.”

FROM these words we learn a truth which is well worthy at all times of our serious consideration, namely, that while every created thing alters from time to time, on the other hand, Jesus Christ, the uncreated, only-begotten Son of the Father, changes not. Howsoever we may alter, He continues the same. He is in His own nature unalterable, unchangeable; and for this reason, because He is not only man, but God. Were He any thing less than God, He must needs be subject to change; for any thing less than God is a creature; and every creature is more or less subject to time; and every thing subject to time is subject to change. God only inhabiteth eternity; God only is not subject to time; God only, therefore, is not subject to change.

This title of unchangeable is what in the Old Testament God claims for Himself. Thus, in the book of the Prophet Malachi, "I am the Lord," He says, "I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."¹ Speaking also of His eternal purpose concerning the redemption of man, He declares, by the Psalmist, that it alters not. "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips. I have sworn once by My holiness, that I will not fail David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his seat is like as the sun before Me."² Again, in the book of Numbers, we read, "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"³ And in like manner St. James says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."⁴

This also even by nature alone we seem to understand: I mean, nature itself teaches us that the Eternal God must be unchangeable. For whatever is changeable we feel to be perishable, and naturally fear to depend upon. Accordingly we value persons whose characters are not inclined to change, feeling that we can depend upon such. But those persons who often change, we never put

¹ Mal. iii. 6.

² Ps. lxxxix. 34.

³ Numb. xxiii. 19.

⁴ James i. 17.

trust in. Now, we have an instinctive feeling that God must needs be a Being that may be absolutely depended upon. Needs must He therefore be of an absolutely unchanging nature.

The same unchanging character is attributed in Scripture not only to the Father, but also to the Son. Thus the Psalmist says of the Son: "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure: they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail."¹ And in the book of Revelation Jesus Christ thus declares concerning Himself: "I am the first and the last, the beginning and the end."² And again, in our text, we read, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

We must, then, receive it as an eternal truth, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Son of the Virgin Mary, God and man in one Person by taking of the manhood into God, is an unalterable, unchangeable Being; that what He was when He ascended into heaven, the same He is now, the same He will be for ever; that the time will never arrive when the two natures of God and Man will in Him be separated. Of His kingdom, and of Himself as King, there shall

¹ Ps. ciii. 25.

² Rev. xxii. 13.

be no end. Having once taken upon Himself our flesh, as second Person of the blessed Trinity, receiving the temporal into the Eternal, in that flesh will He perpetually endure. In the language of the second article, "The Son, which is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect natures—that is to say, the Godhead and manhood—were joined together in one Person, never to be divided."

This truth, I say, every Christian must hold fast as a most glorious and consoling belief, that, however much he himself may change, Jesus Christ, not only in His divine but in His human nature, is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." So that when the world, and the stars, and all other created things, come to an end, He will then be the same as He is now; and He is now the same as He was at that moment when, ascending into heaven, He sat down in our nature at the right hand of God. So that, looking forward even to the utmost reach of eternity, no Christian need fear that in the most distant conceivable ages he will be left without that same Christ to depend upon on whom he now depends—united with whom, through His manhood, then as now, he will be able for ever to draw nigh unto God, whom to approach otherwise would be to perish.

This, then, being our most consoling and as-

sured belief, that our divine Saviour is unchanging and unchangeable—that He in whom we have life will continually endure the same as He is now, so that for ever and for ever He will be our life, and we in Him (if so be that we obtain mercy at the Judgment) shall have life everlasting, and at no time come to an end, because neither will He come to an end, nor ever cease to be what now He is—this, I say, being the case, let us endeavour to stir ourselves up to a religious life by often reflecting on this great truth. For what says St. John? “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”¹ Purify ourselves we must, and must ever be seeking after a continual renewing of ourselves through the Spirit, if ever we hope to live with Christ through that long hereafter. If ever we hope to be in His likeness then, needs must we seek to be conformed to His image now. For He came to be our example; and since He will not and cannot change to be like us, we must change to be like Him. All which is possible by the power of the Holy Ghost—that blessed Spirit who, provided we will work together with Him, will work together with us in changing us, so that we may be transformed by

¹ 1 John iii. 2.

the renewing of our mind. And none can know how greatly it is possible for them to be changed from evil to good ; for none know the power of that Spirit, who can “work exceeding abundantly in us above all that we ask or think.”¹

Let us consider, therefore, that Christ being unchangeable, then only can we be happy when we partake in our measure of His own unchangeable nature ; and then only shall we partake of that nature, when, ceasing to love this changeable world and its lusts, we turn our souls towards Him, who only is our life, and endeavour to walk after the pattern of His holiness.

Now, to understand better the exceeding glory of our Saviour in regard to His unchangeable existence, consider only how, whilst Christ continues the same, all created things are continually altering. For what is there that does not change, except Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, blessed for evermore ?

Consider, first, the angels. Even they are subject to change. We know that a great change did take place in them at that time when great multitudes of them left their first estate. We know that there are things which even the elect angels desire to look into, and which are to them a spectacle from which they learn the manifold wisdom of God. Thus even the holy angels grow in the knowledge of God ; and as in knowledge, so in

¹ Eph. iii. 20.

love. Even they, therefore, change; for an alteration in knowledge is itself a change. Whereas God, to whom all things are known from the beginning, does not alter in knowledge; but, as in substance, so in wisdom, is perfect, and therefore unchangeable. The fallen angels also are waiting a change at the end of the world, when they will be cast into a place prepared for them—a place of torment, which as yet they have not entered.

And if angels, good and evil, are subject to change, the one for better, the other for worse; if spiritual beings are thus capable of alteration, much more are material things subject to the same law. For instance, the stars, great and numerous though they be, are certainly subject to change. They had a beginning; this had not Christ. They will come to an end some day; this will not Christ. They change in the mean while; this does not Christ. Harken to the Psalmist: “The heavens shall perish, but Thou remainest. They shall be changed, but Thou art the same.” And, in fact, changes from time to time have been seen in the stars; and some which formerly appeared large, have, in the course of a few hundred years, seemed to become small; and others have altogether disappeared. The sun and moon also are subject to change; indeed, changes are continually noticed upon them by those who make it their business to observe them. And what says the Prophet, describing what shall one day take place in them?

“The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come.”¹ And if in these distant objects changes are observed to be continually taking place, much more do we, who live upon this earth, find that alterations are perpetually being effected upon it. Whereas Christ endureth the same for ever, this earth, this world, is for ever changing. What says St. John? “The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”²

The earth changeth! How are we reminded of this at this very season, when we are just beginning a new year! During the last twelve months this globe on which we live has traversed many millions of miles round the sun, and every day throughout the whole year has revolved once entirely round. And by that means what changes of seasons, what vicissitudes of day and night, has it not experienced! Winter, spring, summer, and autumn have followed one another in quick succession. Heat and cold, light and darkness, have interchanged one with another. At no moment has there been a ceasing from change—at no moment will the changes cease, until that great change of all, which brings in the end of all things. Then the elements will melt with fervent heat; then the earth, and the works that are therein, will be burned up; then there will be no more sea.

¹ Joel ii. 31.

² 1 John ii. 17.

But till that time comes, all is change. The winds, the sea, the clouds, the trees, the flowers will be for ever changing about. "The sun will arise, and the sun will go down. The wind will go toward the south, and turn about unto the north. The rivers will run into the sea, yet the sea will not be full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they will return again. All things will be full of labour. The thing that hath been will be again."¹

And if natural things are thus subject to change, as we see they are, how much more do we feel that changes are continually taking place in the history of man! What is the whole record of human life, from the beginning of the world, but a history of continual changes? How many great nations are altogether passed away, as if they had not been! Our fathers, where are they? Let us think of our own relations, and consider how many changes in a few years past have taken place amongst them: marrying and giving in marriage, deaths and funerals, births, sicknesses, sorrows, disappointments, loss of property, increase of wealth, alteration of opinions, — what vast changes, by means of all these, are found to have taken place in every family even in a few years! Then, too, it is to be considered, that we have all likewise changed inwardly in the state of our souls; for it is impossible for the soul to remain

¹ Ecclesiastes i. 7.

fixed at one point. Not to improve is to go back. They that are not with Christ are against Him. Every one of us is, at this moment, either nearer Heaven or nearer Hell than he was this time last year. Let this thought urge us on to a serious work of improvement, before it be too late. Not one of us is half so religious as he might be. We ought all of us to be far better than we are. We might all give up more time every day to prayer, and to the study of holy Scripture, and to works of charity, than we do. Those who are engaged in business might give themselves up more to God than they do, if only they chose. Those who have leisure might dedicate themselves more entirely to religion than is their custom, if only they had the heart for it. How many hours, days, weeks, months, have been wasted by us this last year, which might have been spent to the eternal profit of our souls! How little have we redeemed the time!

Changed indeed we all are, but how few for the better! Let each of us examine himself sincerely, and searchingly ask himself only this one question, "Do I love God more now than I did this time last year? Do I even love God at all?" And remember that we are bound to be increasing continually in the love of God. And no Christian is safe unless he really and truly does love God; yet how few love God as they ought! and how almost none at all as they might!

Happy indeed is our case, if in this last year we have really improved in the love of God! Happy, if, even by great troubles and miseries, we have been brought to love Him whom truly to love is life! Happy, if we have learnt to think less of this world, to love it less, to love less all that it has to give, all that is in it! Happy, if even in a slight degree we have advanced in the knowledge of God and of Christ! for “this is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent.” Happy, if we have increased in reverence towards God’s most holy name, if we have learnt to be more devout in His holy house, if we have endeavoured to deny ourselves; finally, if, in the words of the collect for this day, seeking “the true circumcision of the Spirit, mortifying our hearts and all our members from all worldly and carnal lusts,” we have even in some things aimed at obeying God’s blessed will!

On the other hand, most miserable are we, if, while Christ continues the same to-day, yesterday, and for ever, and requires of us to be continually changing and transforming ourselves, by aid of the Holy Spirit, into His likeness, we, on the contrary, have been changing all through the last year, not into His likeness, but into the likeness of this world. What says the Apostle? “Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.”¹

¹ Rom. xii. 2.

We, like all other creatures of time, cannot avoid changing. The only question is, whether we are changing after the likeness of the world, that is to say, becoming more and more worldly and self-indulgent; or whether we are changing after the likeness of Christ, that is, becoming more and more holy and self-denying.

Most wretched, then, are we, if in the last year we have on the whole learnt to love the world more; whereas St. John expressly says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."¹ For whoever loves any thing will be certainly conforming himself to it, and becoming like it. Now the world is a thing that passes away and perishes. He, therefore, who loves it will be becoming of the same nature as itself is. He also will become changeable like it, perishable like it; and when it perishes, he will perish with it.

Whereas Christ, on the other hand, being evermore the same, imperishable, eternal, unchangeable, he who loves Christ will grow into the likeness of Christ, will partake more and more of His imperishable, unchangeable nature; and when the world comes to an end, and they who have conformed themselves to the world perish with the world, then his true life will be just beginning, and will continue without end. In the words of St. John before quoted, "The world passeth away,

¹ 1 John ii. 15.

and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

My brethren, let us seriously lay this matter to heart, and, now that a new year is beginning, let us first thank God that in His mercy He has continued to us our life till now; secondly, let us resolve that we will forthwith begin a stricter line with ourselves. Let us set ourselves appointed religious duties, and diligently keep to them. Let us endeavour, by the careful use of the short time remaining to us, to obtain that degree of holiness which is requisite to be established in us, if ever we hope to see God. Let us seriously reflect that every one of us has a great many bad habits, which must be rectified before he dies; that it takes a long time to correct even one bad habit; and that it is more likely we shall die soon than that we shall live long. Above all things, let us persuade ourselves of the mighty strength of the Holy Ghost, who, provided we be but in earnest, can marvellously change the whole character of our souls; let us remember that since Christ has ascended into heaven, there is a Power in the world Who can work in us abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, provided we but ask aright, and, in asking, really mean what we say.

SERMON X.

FAITH AND SIGHT.

FEAST OF ST. THOMAS.

JOHN XX. 29.

“ Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

It is generally to be remarked of our Saviour's language to His Apostles and Disciples on different occasions, that even when the circumstance which called forth His words was peculiar of its kind, He yet oftentimes so fashioned what He said, that it became of universal application. The remark directed to this or that disciple, not only exactly met the particular point then in question, but, surpassing the occasion, contained within itself some broad truth, some general principle, some universal command, common to every age and all generations.

And well indeed did this system of doctrine become Him, the Only-begotten of the Father, who,

although in the days of His humiliation He was clothed in our flesh, nevertheless is God from all eternity. Well indeed it became Him to speak universal truths to His particular followers, when taking-in in His vision a thousand years to come as but one day, He beheld, in that little trembling flock, the beginning of a kingdom which was to extend over all nations, and through all ages, to the remotest posterities of mankind.

Now in respect to the words addressed to St. Thomas in our text, what I have just said seems particularly applicable.

You all know the occasion on which these words were spoken. You all remember how Thomas, who was not present with the other Apostles when our Lord appeared to them, declared that he would not believe Christ to have risen from the dead, without the most visible and certain of possible testimonies. "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe." These were his words—words strongly savouring of an unbelieving heart; especially when we consider that St. Thomas had seen our Lord's miracles, had accompanied Him in His journeys, had heard His divine words spoken as no man ever spoke, and, as one would have thought, had thus had every opportunity given him of perfecting his belief in his Saviour.

However, our Lord, in His great mercy, did not forget or disregard His nearly-lost disciple, and having once loved him, loved him to the end.

“After eight days, again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God.”

This relation leaves us at liberty to conclude that St. Thomas, on seeing our Lord, was too abashed and confounded, and dazzled doubtless, by that heavenly vision, to put his purpose into execution. For we are not told that Thomas actually carried his unbelief so far as to feel the prints of the nails. We are only told that he answered and said, “My Lord and my God.” But however this matter be, the answer of our Saviour cannot be mistaken. “Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

In these words we seem to be shewn the difference between worldly and Christian grounds of belief. “Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed.” This is the system of the world, and of those who live by the world’s precepts: not to believe except on actual sight, and to be scrupulous

in believing even then. "Seeing is believing;" such is the rule which is, and ever has been, in highest repute amongst men, and hence it has grown into a proverb. But very different from this rule of sight is that law of faith which is implied in the second part of our text: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Here we find that there is an order of belief of a higher class than the former. The world says, "seeing is believing," and will believe on no other ground. Christ says, "believe without seeing." Here is the law of faith, here is the rule of Christianity; just contrary to the world's system, and the rules of the world.

And which of these habits of mind is it that is pronounced blessed? Our Lord tells us: "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Here, then, it seems to me that we have an opportunity of considering the nature of faith, as opposed to sight.

And, first, the law of sight: "Because thou hast seen, thou hast believed." In these words our Saviour informs His Apostle that he had acted upon that law common to the world, "seeing is believing;" a law which, however needful in much of the business of human life, is by no means applicable universally to Christianity; for although in the Christian religion there are some things which can be seen, yet the greater matters in it are un-

seen and invisible, and beheld only by the eye of faith. Nevertheless, so great is the effect of the visible things of this world upon the minds of men, so strongly do external objects press upon the senses, that even those Christians who upon the whole are sincere in their profession, are too often led away by this delusion. That habit of mind which the whole system of the world encourages, is to believe in the things which are seen, and disregard the things which are not seen. And although, as I before remarked, in the common concerns of life men are necessitated to act on this principle, and to do otherwise would be foolish and improvident, yet this very circumstance becomes a snare to mankind, too many, alas, of whom transfer unreasonably to Christianity that habit which they reasonably enough practise in the world; and habituating themselves to believe in their daily life what they see, learn to give very little belief to what in Christianity is unseen.

Indeed, my brethren, I do exceedingly fear that by far the greater number of us are deluded more or less, without being aware of it ourselves, by all those visible things which the god of this world throws in our way. The effect of seeing so many objects which this visible scene continually presents to our eyes, is in the case of some minds exceedingly injurious to a spiritual sense of things invisible. It gratifies that evil tendency which in Scripture is called "the lust of the eye." It leads

us to bestow our chief attention and belief on those things which are tangible; it materialises our conceptions, and creates a deadness in our souls.

From the very first dawn of our infancy, to the extreme of old age, the god of this world is continually amongst us invisibly, haunting our senses with the things which are seen, and dazzling our eyes with the sight of them, so that we may be blinded against the light of the glorious gospel of Christ.

The woods, the fields, the mountains, the valleys, the clouds, the ocean, all the wonderful, and beautiful, and amazing works with which God has enriched this lower order of things,—all these celestial and terrestrial wonders, great as they are in themselves, greater in their Creator, yet have nevertheless the tendency, if we do not watch ourselves, of withdrawing our minds from spiritual realities, from Eternity, from Christ, from Heaven, from Hell, from the Resurrection of the dead, from the Judgment to come. And thus it is that many, who could appreciate and describe very well the amazing scenes which are exhibited in the natural world, have nevertheless shewn themselves to be without a sense of things unseen, which certainly contain by far the greatest wonders of creation; for “the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”¹

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

And all this pressure of external things upon our minds, calling away our trust and belief from the invisible to the visible, is felt, as I said before, even at the very commencement of our life. Scarce are we born but we are thrown upon sight for dependance. All that we begin to learn is first obtained through our senses; and with what difficulty are we as children brought to understand the great principle of things unseen! How strangely do we mix up the two things together in our minds, confounding what we see with what we do not see! Then as we grow older the same system continues. We are early taught that there is much deception if we go beyond the limit of our senses. We soon find that it is the custom in the world to believe only on sight; that no other testimony is considered certain; and that if a matter is being discussed, the first question is, Did you see it yourself? Then, entering further into life, we find this same law to hold good in every subdivision of all the concerns of the human race; that it is in all men's mouths, and that all men act by it.

Many, again, have their life cast in large cities. Here a constant succession of artificial objects is presented to their eyes. They behold no longer the woods and the fields, the valleys and the mountains, where, if the storm draw attention to itself, nevertheless there is yet a still small voice whispering of things unseen. In the place of

these, nothing from day to day meets their eyes but a continual whirlpool of worldly objects, compelling the mind to fix itself upon them, and attracting, and sucking in, and swallowing up, and burying under itself the souls of thousands on thousands in a multitudinous abyss of things temporal; so that, without much serious thoughtfulness and watchfulness, they cannot look up, and, through the worldly mist which crowds round them, discern bright, clear, and glorious, those invisible mansions where the angels are singing, and the voices of the redeemed are heard, and the Lamb is seen standing on Zion.

Such is the difference between the man of the world and the Christian. The man of the world, formed after the model of the world, and by the world's rules, believes only what he can see; and as to things which are purely invisible, these he either secretly doubts or openly ridicules. But he who is a Christian indeed, he too believes what he sees, but, over and beyond this, he believes, if possible in a stronger degree, many things which he does not see. The man of the world says, "Shew me these things, prove them to my senses, let me touch them, let me handle them, let me see the print of the nails, let me put my fingers into the print of the nails, shew me these things on the demonstrative testimony of my senses, and then I will believe." Unhappy man! and dost thou fancy that even then, with all that testimony, thou couldst

of thyself come to God, and have that faith which is the gift of God, and of Him only? Still thou wouldst continue to disbelieve, only in a different manner. But what says the righteousness which is of faith? "Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."¹

The worldling reasons, argues, declaims, doubts, cavils. The Christian does no such thing: he knows that the race which he runs is too urgent to admit of his stopping on the road to misgive, and doubt, and argue, and question with all whom he meets; "he so fights not as one that beateth the air;"² he "so runs that he may obtain;" and as the Israelites of old, so does he too behold before him a bright cloud, a cloud of witnesses, guiding him on: he remembers how all the Saints, seeing Him who is invisible, died in that faith which is the evidence of things not seen; and, knowing this, he too follows in their course, humbly indeed and at a distance, but still with the eye of faith fixed

¹ Rom. x. 6-9.

² 1 Cor. ix. 26.

upon that city which the world cannot see, which only "hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

This is the tenour of his mind with respect to the whole of revelation. But in regard to his Saviour—the centre and bright sun of all that is revealed, the true light of the world, in whom shine the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, and the apostles and martyrs of the New, in whose light we see light—there, if any where, his faith rests more fixedly.

"It is true," he says to himself, "these eyes saw not their Saviour when, on the day of His birth, the angels sang to the shepherds, and the star rested over Bethlehem, and the wise men brought presents as to a king, and a lowly manger sufficed for Him, the high and holy One, that inhabiteth eternity—all this I saw not; yet, nevertheless, do I as truly believe it as though I myself had been by at the time, as though I myself had heard that divine song, or been led by that star.

"It is true I saw not my Saviour when, at the age of twelve years, He sat in the temple, hearing the doctors, and asking them questions, while His parents sought Him sorrowing; yet so truly as that mother sought and found Him, so truly do I believe that He stood in that temple Who is the only-begotten Son of Him whom no temple can contain, filling that house with glory, and making

the glory of the latter house greater than the glory of the former.

“It is true I saw Him not when, in the river Jordan, He fulfilled all righteousness, and was baptised with the baptism of John; yet so surely as though I had been one of that wondering crowd which stood by, so surely do I believe that then the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, ‘Thou art My beloved Son: in Thee I am well pleased.’

“I saw Him not in His temptation, I saw Him not in His transfiguration, I saw Him not at His last supper; yet do I believe that He was tempted, and can succour them that are tempted; yet do I believe that He was transfigured, His face shining as the sun, His raiment white as the light; yet do I believe that in that last supper He instituted a Holy Sacrament, in which His flesh is given through all time for the life of the world.

“I saw Him not at His crucifixion, I saw Him not at His resurrection, I saw Him not at His ascension into heaven; yet, as though the Cross were now before me, and darkness gathering over the earth at the greatness of that sacrifice, so surely do I believe that at the Crucifixion He died, who was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and who became sin for me, that I might be made the righteousness of God in Him; that at the Resurrection He rose in immortality, who

was the first-fruits of the grave, to the end that I myself should no longer live for myself, but for Him who died for me and rose again; and that at the Ascension He ascended into heaven, who now pleads for me at the right hand of the Father; and as He hath gone into heaven, shall so come again in like manner to judge both the quick and the dead.”

Such is the belief of the Christian with regard to the things that are unseen. He walks by faith, not by sight; shewing, in his obedient and humble discharge of every duty, that his faith is not dead, but living. It is true he may faint sometimes, nay, he may faint often: but then he knows in Whom he believes; he knows that God is full of love and mercy, and, for His dear Son's sake, will pardon him on sincere repentance, strengthening and confirming that faith which He originally gave, and leading him with a tender hand, as a father his child.

And now, observe what it is that our Saviour pronounces concerning this temper of mind. “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” He pronounces such, you see, to be blessed. Not those who see and believe, but those who do not see, and yet believe.

And whom think you, my brethren, our Saviour meant by those words, “they that have not seen, and yet have believed?” Did He mean St. Thomas? By no means. This is plain from the very context.

Did He mean the other Apostles? No, not them either; for He had appeared to them before, they had already seen Him.

Doubtless our merciful Saviour had then in His thoughts all those who, from that time till the end of the world, should believe in Him unto life everlasting.

It was but a brief period that He stayed in the world after His resurrection. It was but to few, comparatively speaking, that He then appeared. In a little while He was taken to His Father.

Now, we are all accustomed to regard it as a great privilege possessed by the Christians of that day, that they saw Christ. And doubtless it was a great privilege — a thing which many kings and prophets had desired to see, and had not seen. Yet what says St. Paul? “Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more.”¹ Shewing in these words the superiority of faith to sight. And what says our Saviour? “Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: *blessed* are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

Here, then, we discover a greater privilege, if it were possible, possessed in this day by the Church of Christ than even by those who lived in the times of His flesh. Who of us can see Christ? He has ascended; He has led captivity captive; He has gone up on high. Our eyes can-

¹ 2 Cor. v. 16.

not behold Him ; yet our condition is nevertheless, in deed and in truth, that very one which our Saviour pronounces blessed, if we do but believe.

Oh, you who possess this happiness, consider it well ! Our Lord, you perceive, even when speaking to the Apostle St. Thomas on a particular occasion, did not forget your case, nor the case of any that believe in Him now that He is no longer to be seen. Consider your privilege, make much of it, let the thought of it be your comfort in all your trials. Blessed are ye. Who shall say what that word means ? Who shall say what felicity is contained in it ?

Oh, then, if you have this gift through the great mercy and free grace of God,—for faith is the gift of God, and “thou hast nothing but what thou hast received,”—let not the lustre of so precious a pearl be dimmed by the least inattention or neglect of that heavenly treasure ! Thank God that He has given you this grace ; pray to Him that He will increase it in you continually. More and more let your mind rest, your thoughts dwell, on the world unseen. Be not so much troubled and perplexed by those things which are seen.

Faster than on eagle's wings we are all of us being borne along into the realms of the invisible. They only are eternal ; they only are imperishable ;—imperishable bliss, eternal torment. Into one or other of these all whom I now see before me are

hurrying on, there to meet that wonderful, that unseen Being who is the object of our faith ; there to enter those unknown abodes where unutterable bliss awaits those who have not seen Christ, and yet have believed ; and inconceivable misery awaits such as have not seen Him, whom yet they have rejected.

Some early, some late, some by accident, some by disease, some in youth, some in old age ; by day, by night, at all hours, at all seasons, asleep, awake, we are all moving onward, each in his turn, to drop down silently into the depths of an unseen existence. Our course is inevitable ; no power can make it pause. Whether we believe or disbelieve, this truth is equally the same with every one of us, that in but a little while we must meet face to face our now invisible Lord and Master in an invisible world. There every thing which we now see will be as nothing. There "old things will have passed away, all things will have been made new." There the thousand visible objects which now occupy the thoughts of men, and bury their souls in a multiplicity of human engagements, will have ceased altogether, will have no existence. There, divested of every thing which now attracts and absorbs her, the soul shall appear before her God and Saviour, to give account of her deeds done in the body, whether they were good, or whether they were evil.

Oh, terrible voice of most just judgment,

which shall then be pronounced upon many who now, believing only what they see, are careless of what they do not see! With all the memories of their past neglect crowding over them, with the bitter sense that their time for repentance and amendment is gone by, how shall they sorrow for having suffered themselves to be deluded by the fair promises of the god of this world, and drowned in the giddy vortex of the business, dissipation, and frivolities of this present life!

But let me not think this of you, my brethren; let me rather hope that the unseen world does occupy your thoughts, and is not dismissed from them when you go forth from these sacred walls. Let me trust that you feel that great truth, "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." And God grant that, seeing Him who is invisible, you may not only be the children of Abraham's faith, but also the heirs of his glory, through Christ our Lord, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, praise, and dominion, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XI.

LOOKING AT THE INVISIBLE.

ON THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR.

2 CORINTHIANS iv. 18.

“ While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

SUCH was the thought with which the Apostle Paul comforted himself, amid the abundant troubles and afflictions which he daily endured in the cause of Christ. He had before said, that “as the sufferings of Christ abounded in him, so his consolation also abounded by Christ.”¹ Let us see, then, in what respect this thought, which is expressed in our text, afforded consolation to him, and if to him, then to all other Christians who walk according “as they have him for an example,” “in whose hearts God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”²

¹ 2 Cor. i. 5.

² 2 Cor. iv. 6.

Now, if we examine the sentiment, or rather the sacred truth, taught in our text, we shall see what it was which gave St. Paul such abundant comfort in the midst of tribulations compared with which the afflictions which many of us are called upon to endure are light indeed.

“We look not,” he says, “at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

First, you see, he believed fully, and was most absolutely persuaded, that there are two states, two worlds, two conditions, each equally real:—the things which are seen, the one state; the things which are not seen, the other state.

Secondly, he looked (or as is signified by the original Greek, he aimed) not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen.

Thirdly, he gives the reason: namely, because the one state of things is temporal, that is, lasting but for a time; the other state is eternal, lasting for ever. And the thought that he was truly aiming at those eternal things, and that amidst them, and within them, there was an exceeding and eternal weight of glory laid up for himself, in return for his afflictions, borne for Christ’s sake,—this thought gave him, in all his sufferings, not only patience, but joy; so that, “though sorrowful, he was” nevertheless “always rejoicing.”¹

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 10.

Let us consider this subject; and, first, let us reflect on that great and most awful truth, that, besides the things which we see, we are also concerned in many other things which we do not see, much more wonderful, much more glorious, than the former, and not a whit the less real because we do not happen to be gifted at present with the power of beholding them.

You know, in the Creed, God the Father Almighty is said to be maker of all things visible and invisible. By visible things are meant all things which our senses, whether of touch, taste, sight, scent, or hearing, are able to distinguish,—the world and all that is therein, sun, moon, and stars, the air, the clouds, land and sea, cities, mankind, our own homes, our relations, our friends, our own bodies. All these things, and many more, whether constituting the world of nature, or the world of art, the vain pomp and glory of life, or the sober round of business, make up together one vast spectacle which is continually before us, and perpetually exciting our notice.

And too many there are, who, seeing these visible objects constantly about them, learn to regard them as the principal things. Led away by the lust of the eye and the pride of life, they look only to that which they see, form schemes only in connexion with such objects, labour for such things, taking earnest thought “what they shall eat, what they shall drink, and wherewithal they

shall be clothed ;”¹ and this to such an extent that, amidst the continual excitement and bustle of life, they altogether forget that, besides the objects which they see, they are also involved in many objects which are unseen.

By that expression, “the unseen,” the Apostle doubtless refers us not only to created invisible things, but to the Creator Himself. God Himself, the Creator of all, is the principal and chief amid unseen realities. “No man hath seen God at any time.”² And as this is true of God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, so it is true of the Holy Ghost,—He also is unseen; like the wind, “which bloweth where it listeth, but no man can tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth.”³ Christ also, though once visibly seen and handled, and though hereafter to be seen again as He is, when, at the end of the world, He shall come in like manner as He went, yet at present is invisible, and makes His approach in a purely spiritual manner. Then, again, even amid things created, consider how many are invisible. All the holy angels, although some of them have from time to time been beheld by mortal eye, are to us invisible; Satan also is invisible; heaven is invisible; hell is invisible; the mansions of the intermediate state are invisible; the souls of the dead are invisible. They live, indeed, unto God, but they are out of our sight. Nay, even the souls of the living are out

¹ Matt. vi. 31.

² John i. 18.

³ John iii. 8.

of our sight also : we see the bodies of our friends, but not their souls. And thus we are as it were surrounded with many wonderful and awful unseen realities, which may be much nearer to us than we are inclined to suppose ; and as we die, we ourselves pass into that unseen state, and find these things to be real.

You see, then, the mercy of God in not leaving us in ignorance that there is an unseen world, but in sending His Son to teach us its existence, and to warn us of our connexion with it, and the necessity of our being prepared, if we would enter into its blessed abodes. And from our text we learn what the feeling of Christians ought to be with regard to it ; namely, that they ought to be looking and aiming, not at the seen, but at the unseen : that they ought to have constantly before their view, and in their minds, the unseen God and Father of all ; looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith ; looking to the Holy Ghost, to sanctify them and make them holy : that we ought to live with heaven and hell as it were in our sight, as having unseen angels for the witnesses of our actions, and the hosts of Satan surrounding us, ready to lead us captive,—doing all things by all means to keep up in our minds a lively sense of the reality of an invisible world, and of our future state in that world ; bearing in mind the souls of the departed, the eternal truth that we must, ere long, be with

them, and the absolute necessity of our resurrection from the dead, to be punished or rewarded in the body according to our works. And when I say that Christians ought ever to keep these things in mind, what is it but to say that Christians should ever live by faith, and not by sight; that by faith they should realise things unseen as though present? not neglecting on that account their duties in that state of life to which God hath called them in this present visible world, but doing all things with a view to that eternal life, "which God hath "given us in Christ Jesus before this" visible "world began."¹

And this brings me, lastly, to the reason why we should do this. "For," says the Apostle, "the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

The things which are seen belong to time; the things which are not seen belong to Eternity. The first of these truths we are strongly reminded of to-day. On this day we begin a New Year. On this day another unit is added to the date by which time is reckoned throughout all Christendom. At such a season the rapidity with which time is passing on is forcibly brought home to us; and we cannot but reflect on the great changes which from year to year it is producing in ourselves, and in all around us. For the nature of time is, to be ever accompanied by change.

¹ 2 Tim. i. 9.

Time and change go together. Time is ever changing, and we with it. All things that exist in time are subject to change; and all things that are subject to change, must decay in the end. And this is the case with the things that are seen, which are temporal; and at the beginning of a new year we feel it so to be. We feel that not only the natural world is passing on from change to change and never at rest, but also that the same is the case with human life, with our own life, with the lives of all others, and even with the secret course of our thoughts; and that the end of all this mutation is at last, so far as this world is concerned, decay and death. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return:" this was spoken at first of man himself; but it seems also to be true of all his pursuits—of all the pride of life, and vain show of the world; from dust they spring, to dust they are ever returning. And our duty as Christians is, not to feel this only now and then, and on extraordinary occasions, but to seek after an habitual and constant persuasion in our minds that all which is in the world is passing away; otherwise we shall be ensnared by it. Remember those words of the beloved Apostle: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. . . . The world passeth away, and the lust thereof."¹

Oh, unhappy state of mind in any immortal

¹ 1 John ii. 15, 17.

being, to love the world, and that which is of it; to be ever looking to those things which are mortal, and not to the things which are immortal! And yet this is what the greater part of mankind do: ever calculating and scheming for certain advantages, enjoyments, or honours of this life, and seeking not the honour which cometh from God, the pleasures which are at His right hand for evermore. And there are thousands who confess they do this, and that they are wrong in so doing; and yet they continue in the same course, not considering that if their own heart condemn them, then how much must they be condemned by God, who is “greater than their heart, and knoweth all things!”¹ And how many are careful of their time, taking pains not to waste any of it, so far as worldly matters are concerned; but so far as the world to come is involved, they deliberately waste the whole of it, not laying in store against the evil day, not redeeming time with a view to eternity, but looking only to fleeting present things; forgetting that a life neglectful of God will as much shut them out from heaven as positive crimes committed against the divine laws.

Whereas, in opposition to all this, the temper of mind recommended in our text by the Apostle, is exactly the contrary. “We look not,” he says, “at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which

¹ 1 John iii. 20.

are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Men may think as they please, may act as they choose, may give up their attention, if they will, altogether to the things of this life; but this cannot alter the law of the Most High, that the perpetual changes of human existence must at last carry these men themselves, together with the rest of mankind, as it were on the bosom of a mighty and irresistible tide, into that hidden eternal world which now they forget or despise; there to receive an exact return for all their deeds, to the uttermost farthing; there to be judged according to all their thoughts, words, and actions of this life, by the righteous Judge whom God hath appointed over quick and dead.

On the other hand, to those who are spending their present lives in a true observance of Christ's commandments, in a true desire after His glory, and a true love of Him,—such persons, although at best they know themselves to be lamentably deficient and unprofitable, yet, in the contemplation of that Advocate, who is ever pleading with the Father for His faithful servants; in the thought of that unchangeable, imperishable, undecaying state of glory opened to them through the passion and death of Christ, they may well afford to bear patiently even the most terrible changes which in this present state may threaten them. It is the prerogative of the Christian “to be afraid of no evil tidings,

because his heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord ;”¹ to be calm and tranquil in the depths of his soul, amid the greatest disturbances of this present state ; and why ? because he looks at the things which are unseen, which are eternal, which are unchangeable ; at Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ; because his mind is by faith and in hope dwelling on those things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived, but which God hath prepared for them that love Him ; because he walks by faith, not by sight, beholding Him who is invisible, and certain that if he is faithful to God, God will be faithful to him.

Let it be our constant endeavour, my brethren, truly and from the heart to aim at such a frame of mind ; and with this view, let us be diligent in our study of that divine book from whence our chief knowledge of the unseen world is derived. Let us, as opportunity allows, use all those means which are provided in the Church of Christ for keeping up in our minds, even in the midst of our necessary worldly occupations, a constant and vivid sense of that unseen condition, into which every year and every day, as it comes and goes, is conveying us. Let us realise to ourselves the awful truth, that on the employment of our time which we now have depends our condition in the whole eternity which is to come, in like manner as

¹ Ps. cxii. 7.

the nature of a plant depends on the nature of the seed. Let us not be deceived: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."¹

¹ Gal. vi. 7.

SERMON XII.

CHRIST'S SECRET PROVIDENCE.

FUNERAL SERMON.

JOHN xiii. 7.

“ Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.”

FROM these words of our blessed Lord, addressed to St. Peter, we may obtain a useful lesson in regard to the general dealings of God's providence towards ourselves; but let us first consider the occasion on which they were spoken.

It was, then, as we learn from the first verse of this chapter, just before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus, knowing that His hour was come, having loved His own which were in the world, and, still loving them unto the end, held that last supper of His, in which He instituted the Sacrament of His body and blood. “And the supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him; Jesus knowing that the Father had

given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. Then cometh He to Simon Peter: and Peter said unto Him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?"

Peter, it seems, could not understand this action of our Saviour, in taking upon Himself so low an office as that of washing His disciples' feet. He remembered, doubtless, that St. John the Baptist had declared himself unworthy to stoop down and unloose the latchet of the shoes of Jesus. How, then, could it become this same Jesus to wash the feet of others? When, therefore, it came to his own turn, he took upon himself to rebuke our Lord: "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" To this, Jesus at first answered by a mild appeal to his faith: "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." But Peter becoming more resolute in his refusal, and replying, "Thou shalt never wash my feet," Jesus was constrained to answer him more sharply, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." Peter saith unto Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." He could not endure, you see, the thought of having no part in Christ. He desired rather to be as closely

united with Him as possible. "Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all. For He knew who should betray Him; therefore said He, Ye are not all clean." Then, after having gone round to all the Apostles, and having taken His garments again and sat down, He explained to them what He had been doing: "Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet: for I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you."

In these words our Lord declares the object of the act which He had just performed; and in this explanation we find the fulfilment of the promise which He had before made to St. Peter: "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." St. Peter beforehand could not imagine why our Lord should wash his feet, and had therefore refused to permit Him. Jesus, promising him an explanation, required of him in the meantime to submit. Then, when all were washed, He set forth the reason of His act; namely, that it was intended to teach them humility one towards another.

This, then, is the immediate and obvious mode of interpreting that expression, "What I do

thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." But when we consider the exceeding preciousness of all our Saviour's words, and that He spoke as no man ever spoke, with a fulness of meaning applicable to all times, we shall find, I think, in these words another and a deeper lesson; for they teach us in a very evident manner the necessity of submitting in faith to all the dispensations of Christ's providence, whatever they may be.

As on this occasion St. Peter was required by our Saviour to acquiesce in the washing, even against his own view of the case, and was told that if he would thus submit, he should afterwards have the reason explained to him of that which now seemed so extraordinary; so also it is in Christ's dealings towards His servants by His providence now. Like Peter, we are all of us at different times called upon to yield ourselves up in faith to what seems inexplicable. Christ suffers or causes many events to happen to us which we cannot fathom, and are unable to see the reason of; and as it were, says to us, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.' Submit yourself; be resigned to My will in this My dispensation towards you, whatever it be; and, unintelligible as it seems to you that yourself in particular, above others, should be called upon to endure this trial, I have My reasons for bringing this to pass, though you know them not.

Wait in faith : hereafter you shall see that all was done for the best ; that God doth not capriciously afflict the children of men, but for their own profit ; and that your own case in particular, unreasonable as it seems to yourself, is very reasonable with Him. ‘What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.’”

Well would it be for us all, my brethren, if we could persuade ourselves thus to regard whatever happens to us, and causes us difficulty in the events of our life ; well would it be for us if we had that faith which, under all circumstances, could rest content in the secret Providence of Christ. You know it is said of Him in the Old Testament, “Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour ;”¹ and, again, “Thy way is in the sea, and Thy paths in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known.”² Further, when God appeared upon this earth in human shape as the man Christ Jesus, He was often as it were hiding Himself from men. He spoke for the most part in parables, which persons could not understand on first hearing. He explained them afterwards to those who asked in faith. Even to His own disciples His manner was oftentimes difficult to understand ; as in the case of St. Peter, which we have just been considering. In regard to His resurrection, He told them, indeed, that He

¹ Is. xlv. 15.

² Ps. lxxvii. 19.

should rise again, but did not explain it. When He actually rose, then they understood what He had meant. Even after His resurrection it was the same. You remember the case of the two disciples going to Emmaus. They did not know it was Christ who had been walking with them until He was leaving them.

And so it is still. Christ is ever with us unseen, dispensing to us the events of our life by His providence; and many things happen to us which it is difficult for us to understand now, but we shall understand them hereafter. For instance, often, in the midst of health and spirits, a person is struck with some painful disease; or, again, in the fulness of prosperity he may be overwhelmed with unlooked-for adversity. Now, such things at the time seem hard to bear; but afterwards we find out that it was "good for us to have been in trouble,"¹ as the Psalmist says; that God had a gracious design towards us in visiting us in that manner,—desiring thereby to teach us His statutes, to soften our hearts, to bring us nearer to Him, to lead us to humility and to greater trust in Him.

Let us endeavour to keep this in mind, and we shall find it a very great source of consolation in all our trials. If, for instance, we are visited with an illness which prevents us from attending to our ordinary occupations, and that

¹ Ps. cxix. 71.

at a time when we most seem to require health, let us not murmur, but say to ourselves, "Thou Lord, who hast sent this visitation, knowest what is best for me; what Thou doest I know not now, but I shall know hereafter, and shall find it to be wise and merciful in the end." If some sudden misfortune befall us in business, or otherwise, let us not repine or be cast down; let us remember that it is the appointment of Christ, and cry out with St. Peter, "O Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." And as children do what their parents tell them, without knowing the reasons of it; so let us submit to our Almighty Father, knowing that He has good reasons for what He ordains. Let us remember how often it has happened that many things, which we thought for our harm, turned out for our good in the end; and let us consider that so it will also be in regard to other events which God sends, provided only we receive them in a right spirit, as from Him.

And as this view is suitable to all the circumstances of life in general which seem untoward, so in a particular manner it is true of those greatest calamities which consist in the loss of our friends or dear relatives by death. At such times we cannot but grieve, and so much the more in proportion to the greatness of our love and of our loss. And the Apostle allows us in this grief; he allows us to sorrow, only not like those who have no hope.

And whence is our hope to proceed? why, from considering that hereafter, when the time of reunion shall come, all will be found to have been for the best,—the best for us, the best also for those whose loss we deplore.

More particularly is this true in the case of those who seem to die before their time, being called to an early grave. For, seeing such a one depart, at first we are astonished at the event; there appears to us something unnatural in it. It seems natural for the old to die, gathered up like a shock in its season; it seems natural for little children to die, from their very tenderness and weakness: but when the young die in their prime, and while hope was yet bright, we are astonished, and marvel at the strange providence. We wonder why such things should be.

Here, then, let us call to mind those words of our Saviour, “What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.” Hereafter, perhaps even in this life, thou shalt have cause to see that in this dispensation God was acting towards thee in perfect wisdom and goodness. Hereafter, certainly in the life to come, thou shalt assuredly know that, both in respect to the beloved being who is departed, and to thyself who survivest, the Eternal hath done all things well.

What perplexes us now, Christ will in the end explain to us, if for the present we will be content in faith to resign ourselves to His most holy will.

“They who sow in tears shall reap in joy.” Are we in tears? let us sow the good seed of repentance and faith, and we shall reap an endless reward. For the departed,—let us be content to know, that as in lifetime so in death, they are in the hands of a faithful Creator and most merciful Saviour. For ourselves who remain,—let us rejoice in the knowledge that every suffering which a Christian is called upon to endure is an additional proof of his having a part in Christ. Christ, in calling us to suffer with Him, shews that we are still His. To Peter He said, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” Had we no sorrows, we might well fear lest we had no fellowship with Christ; for our fellowship with Him, to be complete, must be the fellowship of His sufferings.

At present we see “through a glass darkly;” hereafter we shall “see face to face.” Let us, then, receive all things as from the hand of God, both good and evil; and let us bear all things in faith, looking to that great day when the secret course of His providence shall be revealed; when all that is now uneven shall be found smooth; when all that is now dark and intricate shall be found straight as an arrow and clear as the day; when those who now submit in faith and hope shall find more than hope could anticipate, and shall enjoy more than faith could believe.

SERMON XIII.

ANGELIC MINISTRATIONS.

FEAST OF ST. MICHAEL.

HEBREWS i. 14.

“ Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation ?”

THIS being the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, it will be useful for us to consider seriously the solemn truth which it brings to mind. As on the greater Festivals we commemorate in an especial manner the Events of our Lord's life, so on the remaining Holy Days we call to mind certain other vast portions of the Christian dispensation. As, for instance, there are days on which we celebrate the twelve Apostles of Christ; other days on which we are reminded of His holy mother, the Blessed Virgin; and another day, that of All Saints, on which we are called to meditate upon the state of all them that sleep in the Lord—for we must never forget that the Church which is seen upon earth is but a small part of the whole, and that the greater and more blessed part is already with Christ. Then,

that we may understand still better the greatness of our privileges as members of Christ, and the exceeding loftiness of our birth as children of God, all baptised by one Spirit into one body,—therefore it is that another day is set apart, for the purpose of solemnly reminding us all, that, as Christians, we are come not only “to the spirits of just men made perfect,” but also “to an innumerable company of angels;”¹ the thought of which, if duly encouraged, would be enough in itself to make us very careful how we live, considering that all things being reconciled in the blood of the Cross, “both things in heaven and things in earth,”² we Christians are called to so high a state that the very angels of God are brought nigh unto us, and we to them; so that when in the Communion-service we glorify God, it is not alone that we do so, but it is “with angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven.”

Now, how necessary it is that Christians should be reminded of this important truth! It is to be feared, indeed, that very few realise seriously the existence of those most mysterious beings, with whom we are brought into such close contact. The majority of Christians hardly ever think even in the least about the holy angels, but live on from day to day satisfied with the things which they see, and not looking by faith to things unseen. It is the world, the world only, that occupies their minds;

¹ Heb. xii. 22, 23.

² Col. i. 20.

and this very feast of St. Michael they look forward to, not with any recollection of the holy angels of God, but altogether with a view to the completion of secular engagements.

Let us now briefly consider what the angels are.

The angels, then, are an order of beings who, before this world was, existed in their own habitation, having been created by the Word of God, the Only-begotten, Everlasting Son of the Father, —the same Who afterwards, being born of the Virgin Mary, became flesh for our sakes. “By Him,” says St. Paul, “were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him.”¹

From this we see that in far-distant periods, long before the existence of man, God had those who could glorify Him, namely, the angelic creation; of whom we further learn in Holy Scripture that there was a time when, as we ourselves are now in a state of trial, so also were they; and in that probation many of them fell, and became outcasts from God; of which event St. Jude speaks where he declares that “the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, God hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.”² On the other hand, such of the angels as stood in that

¹ Col. i. 16.

² Jude 6.

trial, whatever it was, and proved themselves to be the faithful servants of God,—these, from that time, were called to a higher state; so that they cannot sin, but in every thing are obedient to the will of God. They are accordingly termed in Scripture “the elect angels;”¹ and our Saviour, in the Lord’s prayer, has taught us to pray that God’s will may be done in earth, as it is continually done by these holy angels in heaven. It appears further from Holy Scripture, that heaven is not the only place of their abode, but that, at the command of the Most High, these awful, most mysterious, and holy creatures of God are often employed on this globe. In the Old Testament, for instance, we read repeatedly of angels appearing to men. It was an angel of the Lord who called unto Abraham out of heaven, when he was about to slay his son; two angels came to Sodom; Jacob on his stony pillow beheld the angels of God ascending and descending; it was an angel that appeared to Manoah, and “did wondrously, ascending in the flame of the altar;” it was a destroying angel that David beheld; it was an angel that annihilated the army of Sennacherib; an angel appeared to Balaam. Sometimes they came as messengers of good tidings, sometimes as avengers, sometimes as deliverers. When Elisha was surrounded by the Syrians his enemies, and his servant in his terror cried out, “Alas, my master, how shall we do?” Elisha an-

¹ 1 Tim. v. 21.

swered, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."¹

Thus, even under the Jewish dispensation, when as yet the Kingdom of God was not come, as it is now, even then the angels of God were at hand to protect His servants; and although some persons could not see them, yet others could. Accordingly the Psalmist says of the angels in his day, "The angel of the Lord tarrieth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."²

In the New Testament we read still oftener of angels appearing. It is not yet two thousand years ago since many of these holy beings were seen by the eye of mortal man. When Christ, the second Adam, came into the world to renew our nature in Himself, angels were attendant on His birth. It was an angel that appeared to Zacharias, "standing on the right side of the altar of incense."³ It was the same angel Gabriel, one of those chief spirits who stand in the presence of God, that appeared to the Virgin Mary, and said, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name

¹ 2 Kings vi. 17.

² Ps. xxxiv. 7.

³ Luke i. 11.

Jesus.”¹ Angels they were, even a great multitude, who appeared to the shepherds as they watched their flocks by night ; to St. Joseph an angel appeared more than once. And it is to be observed that the manifestation of an angel to one of the children of men is a thing fraught with dread ; for in almost every case their address begins with the words “Fear not,” shewing that their presence had inspired the person who beheld them with great fear. Again, they were angels who ministered to our Lord after His temptation ; and in His agony an angel was seen strengthening Him. And He Himself said, that if He chose but to pray to His Father in His great trial, He would presently give Him more than twelve legions of angels. After His resurrection, two angels in white were seen by Mary Magdalene as she looked into the sepulchre. It was the angel of the Lord that “descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow : and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.”²

Again, if, passing from the Gospel history, we turn to that of the Apostles, we shall find that, in extending Christianity through the world, they were not without angelic ministrations. It was an angel of the Lord who, when the Apostles

¹ Luke i. 31.

² Matt. xxviii. 2-5.

were put in the common prison at Jerusalem, “by night opened the prison-doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life;”¹ an angel it was who spoke to Philip, and directed him to the Ethiopian eunuch;² an angel who smote Herod, so that he was eaten of worms, because he gave not God the glory;³ an angel spoke to Cornelius, commanding him to send for St. Peter, and so opening the door of faith to the Gentile world;⁴ an angel delivered Peter from prison as he slept between two soldiers bound with two chains, the iron gate of the prison opening of its own accord.⁵ And, doubtless, in many other instances, too numerous to be mentioned in Holy Scripture, angels have appeared to God’s chosen servants in all times. A sufficient number only of these appearances has been recorded in the Bible to shew us that these holy creatures of God have had a great share in carrying on the divine history of man; and this leads us, in the last place, to consider in what light at the present time we ought to regard them.

For this purpose, let us turn to the collect for the day: “O everlasting God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order; mercifully grant, that as Thy holy Angels always do Thee service in hea-

¹ Acts v. 19.

² Acts viii. 26.

³ Acts xii. 23.

⁴ Acts x. 3.

⁵ Acts xii. 10.

ven, so, by Thy appointment, they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

It is very evident that in this prayer we beseech the Almighty to grant that we may, in this present time, be succoured and defended by His holy angels. And lest we should doubt the possibility of this, we remind ourselves that the services of angels and men are constituted in a wonderful order; in other words, that there are many things in our common life much more wonderful and wonderfully connected than we are apt to suppose, and that therefore it is no marvel if even angels, whose powers are of a nature unknown to us, should be able, by God’s appointment, to be involved with us in various matters of this life.

Consider only, in how many things it is possible for the angels to protect us! First, then, we know that, according to some infinitely awful manner, we are surrounded by evil spirits, whom we cannot see, but who have the power of injecting sinful thoughts into our minds. Now it is exceedingly probable that good Christians are protected from these powers of darkness by the help of angelic beings; for that angels in some way minister to Christians is most certain. Thus St. Paul, in the text says, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” The angels, he

says, minister or serve for them who shall be heirs of salvation. Now, wherein can they serve better than, under God, in protecting us from satanic powers, the great enemies of our souls?

Another mode in which angels minister to mankind is referred to by our Lord in the parable of Lazarus, where He teaches that, when Lazarus died, his soul "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."¹ Considering that, as Christians, we are brought into fellowship with an innumerable company of angels, it is very probable that, in the hour of death, the holy angels are at hand to receive the souls of such as fall asleep in Christ; as, indeed, it is certain that they will be employed to gather together mankind, at the Resurrection from the dead.

Again, in the Gospel for to-day, speaking of the innocence of little children, our Saviour says of them, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven."² From this we are taught a most marvellous truth, namely, that little children, who seem so helpless, have angels appointed over them—angels, too, of such holiness that they always behold the face of God in heaven; and that this is the reason why such little ones are not to be despised.

From this many have been led to suppose

¹ Luke xvi. 22.

² Matt. xviii. 10.

that all Christians, so long as they retain their innocence, and do not fall away from their state of salvation in which they were placed at their baptism, or, having fallen away, have been recovered,—that all such have separate guardian Angels appointed over them. And that this was the opinion of the early Christians, we may, perhaps, infer from the book of Acts; for when Peter was unexpectedly delivered from prison, and had come to the gate of the house of Mary the mother of Mark, and when the damsel Rhoda, going to the gate, heard his voice and knew it; the rest of the persons present could not believe it was Peter himself, but said, “It is his angel.”¹

Certainly, that the holy angels do feel a powerful interest in the souls of individual Christians is evident from our Lord’s words, “I say unto you, joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.”² So difficult is it for one who has once fallen to repent and truly turn to God, that such an event causes joy among the very angels of heaven. Now, how can the angels know when a sinner repents, how can they tell what is passing in our minds, unless they have some means, unknown to us, of watching us much more closely than we are accustomed to think?

Considering, again, that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and yet subject to disease and death, it is very probable that the minis-

¹ Acts xii. 15.

² Luke xv. 7.

tration of angels is employed in matters of sickness and recovery, birth and death, beyond what we usually suppose. When Herod died of worms, it was because "an angel smote him." Those who come to the Holy Communion while in the indulgence of any sinful habit are warned, lest "they provoke God to plague them with divers diseases, and sundry kinds of death."

These considerations will be sufficient to shew us that, although many things in our life appear commonplace, yet, in reality, we are all of us existing in a much more marvellous and mysterious state than we commonly think, and particularly as regards our connexion with the holy angels.

Let us encourage such thoughts. The world is continually drawing us away to itself; and the common course of things, day and night, waking and sleeping, eating and drinking, has a tendency to make us exalt our animal nature, forgetting our higher state. The thought of the presence of the holy angels, and of our mysterious fellowship with them, although we cannot see them with our mortal and sinful eyesight, will go a great way towards keeping us in mind that this world is only a passage to another, that nothing in this world is worth very much; "for the world passeth away, and the lust thereof." To those, also, who have taken pains to obtain a right knowledge in regard to what Scripture has revealed to us concerning the angels, diligent meditation upon them will serve

as a powerful means of exciting to a holy life; for such persons will consider whom they have for the spectators of their actions, and that they are never alone, even when they seem to be most of all alone. This same thought, of the companionship of the angels, will bring them comfort in all troubles and desertions; and however much they may be called upon to suffer for conscience-sake, or however much they may be despised by men, it will be an ever-enduring consolation to reflect that, beyond all doubt, the holy angels love them. Especially will this reflection encourage Christians to aim at being humble, bearing in mind that "he who humbleth himself shall be exalted;" and that none are so like to angels as those who esteem little of themselves for Christ's sake. The same thought will also prevent an undue fear of death, since death is, to the true Christian, but the opening of a door into a more complete fellowship with those glorious societies of angelic beings, from whom in this life our sins and manifold corruptions separate us, though not altogether, yet in a great degree.

May that God who has constituted the services of angels and men in a wonderful order, give us all grace to reflect upon these truths to the eternal profit of our souls; that, remembering to what high things we are called, we may ever set ourselves a high standard, and press forward to the prize set before us, even eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

SERMON XIV.

SATANIC INFLUENCES.

EPHESIANS vi. 12.

“We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

CHRISTIANITY teaches us our true position in the Universe; and in the epistle from which our text is taken, the chief object of St. Paul seems to have been to enlighten his converts on this point. For as in any art, or science, or business, it is impossible for any person to proceed without knowing what he has to do, what is expected of him, what helps there are at hand, what difficulties are likely to happen; so also in Christianity it is necessary for one who desires to advance in a religious course, to understand first in what position he stands. Therefore it is that in this epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul is very earnest in explaining to them the nature of that state into which they had been called. For instance, in the first chapter he shews that they are to look upon themselves as

the adopted children of God in Jesus Christ, as having redemption through His blood, as having been sealed in baptism with the Holy Spirit of promise; and he declares that it was his constant prayer, that the “eyes of their understanding might be enlightened to know what was the hope of their calling, and what was the exceeding greatness of the power of God in them that believe.” He then goes on to teach them the nature of that holy society, the Church of Christ, which is His mystical body; how God, in bringing them into that body, had by the blood of Christ brought nigh to Himself those who by nature were Gentiles and aliens, calling them to be fellow-citizens with the Saints, and of the household of God, and building them up into an holy temple upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets.

Then, lest they should be ignorant on one very important matter in regard to their condition, he informs them, towards the end of the epistle, of one chief difficulty with which they would have to contend, and for which it was necessary that they should put on the whole armour of God. “Be strong,” he says, “in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God”—on what account?—“that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil.”

Now this is a matter well deserving our serious attention. It is impossible, as has been just said, for any person to advance in any work unless he

has some knowledge of the difficulties in his way. For instance, could a farmer at all succeed, unless he knew some of the difficulties to be expected in farming? Or if there were a bridge to be built, could any builder proceed with it successfully, unless he knew the sort of obstacles which he would have to contend against? Or could a physician cure a person of a disease, unless he were acquainted with the impediments in the way of curing him? Or could a general succeed against an enemy, unless he knew what sort of enemy it was? In short, a knowledge of our position is necessary for us in every work that we have to perform, and especially in religion.

As Christians we are brought into connexion with a great variety of objects, visible and invisible; if, then, we would advance in our Christian course,—as advance we must, for either to stand still or to go back is to perish,—I say, if we would advance, we must possess ourselves with a knowledge concerning the nature of that state into which we are called, and particularly of the difficulties which lie in our way, and of the helps which are at hand to assist us in overcoming them. Ignorance on these points is an incalculable evil. For why is there so much carelessness amongst Christians, but because they are ignorant; because they will not take the pains to possess themselves fully with a sense of their condition, and its many dangers?

Now, amongst many other difficulties, St. Paul in our text reveals to us one of the utmost consequence; one which, nevertheless, very few Christians ever seriously contemplate; the power, namely, of Satanic influence. "Put on," he says, "the whole armour of God,"—and why so?—"that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." How intolerably senseless must those persons be who think it possible that they can live in such a way as to please God, without taking into account this power which is here spoken of! And yet many, and those, too, such as might know better, live all their life long without giving one serious thought to the question, Who is Satan? what is my condition in respect of him? what is the nature of his devices? in what particulars am I liable to them?

I say, that this is a matter of the utmost importance: and yet we have a proof that persons on the whole are very careless about it; for how often is the very name of Satan made a matter of jest and laughter! Whereas, if a person really knew any thing about his own condition, he would be so far from making that dreadful power a matter of jest, that most probably at first, on understanding the true nature of it, he would be ready to despair of safety for either soul or body, when he came to consider the real strength and deadly hatred of his hidden antagonist.

St. Paul sets forth this view more fully in the

verse that follows ; for having shewn that nothing less than the whole armour of God is necessary against the wiles of the devil, he goes on to state the reason why so much caution is required : “ For we wrestle not,” he says, “ against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” From these words we obtain the knowledge of a most alarming fact in regard to Satan ; namely, that the great enemy of our souls is not one single being, but has many other spirits joined with him in that dreadful work which he has chosen to himself.

That work is fearful and truly satanic beyond our conception,—nothing less than the everlasting destruction of the souls and bodies of men in Hell, by means of the second death. For as there is a first death, to which all, both good and bad, must yield themselves ; so, after the resurrection of our bodies, when the souls and bodies of men are again united for ever, there awaits those who have not lived a life of religion a second death, which is styled eternal, because it leads into those unquenchable torments of fire, which are reserved for the devil and his angels, and for all those human beings who shall then be added to that ghastly company. Into this most dreadful, most hopeless state, it is very evident, from Holy Scripture, that at this present time Satan, and other inferior spirits, are endeavouring to draw every soul of

man ; and, if it were possible, they would not leave so much as one to be saved, but would have all perish that ever were born, from the first man that stood on the earth, down to the last that shall come into the world.

Of the wickedness of these spirits, of their utter hatred of God, it is probable that not even the most sinful man breathing can form any conception ; for even in the most wicked there is generally the appearance at least of some one redeeming point ; but in these apostate spirits all is unmixed evil. Time was, indeed, when they were not so lost as they are now ; time was when Satan himself was an Angel of light ; but rebelling against God, and leaving their first estate, they fell from Heaven : and so great was the change which then took place in them, that from that period they became incapable of ever returning to God. For man, when he fell, there was hope ; for the angels, who fell from a higher state, was hope none at all. “ Christ took not on Him the nature of angels ; but he took on Him the seed of Abraham.” Thenceforth, haters and hated of God, their chief effort, so far as we know, has been directed against mankind, His later creation ; and in this work they have been permitted to proceed by the Almighty for the inscrutable purposes of His own glory.

What renders them so deserving of our serious apprehension, may be considered under several heads ; as, for instance, their number, their unity

of purpose, their invisibility, their deceivableness, their perseverance, the general unbelief and carelessness of mankind about them.

First, their number. This might have been concluded from what has been revealed to us concerning the elect angels of God. For since it is clear that the number of good angels is very great,—our Saviour Himself testifying to us that if He prayed to His Father, He might have more than twelve legions of angels,—it would follow, in like manner, that the number of evil spirits is great also. But their vast number is likewise expressly set forth in Scripture. Thus the man in the country of the Gadarenes, out of whom the devils were cast, was possessed by so many evil spirits that they declared their name to be Legion, because they were many; and the swine into whom they entered were not fewer than two thousand.¹ Again, we read of the Devil and his angels; and in our text St. Paul distributes these evil angels into “principalities and powers;” shewing that, as in the case of the elect angels, who have Michael for their prince, these also exist in orders and ranks, one above another, Satan himself holding the supreme authority. On the whole, therefore, there can be no doubt whatever that their number is very great; greater, perhaps, than that of all the human beings who have ever been born into the world.

¹ Mark v. 13.

This, then, bearing in mind their enmity to man, is enough to make us fear. But, secondly, we are to consider their unity: namely, that they are all one society, acting towards one end, the damnation of human souls and bodies. Satan, as our Saviour has declared, is not divided against himself, for then "how should his kingdom stand?"¹ All the principalities beneath him, together with their subject-orders, are joined in one common purpose, and work together for one object. This is a great part of their power. By different means, carnal and worldly, through various passions, temptations, circumstances, they assail the soul of man; but although the means are various, the end is one. True it is, there are different kinds of evil spirits; our Saviour Himself shewing this, when He mentions one particular class, "which went not out but by prayer and fasting:"² and in another place, He speaks of an evil spirit, "which being cast forth from a man, taketh seven other spirits more wicked than himself;"³ from whence it appears that they have degrees of wickedness, Satan, as the highest, being also the most wicked of all. Nevertheless, whatever be their kinds, they are all united together in a harmony of evil. Wicked spirits are all at unity in themselves; in unity against God, in unity in their hatred of both God and man.

Besides their number and their unity, we must

¹ Matt. xii. 26.

² Matt. xvii. 21.

³ Matt. xii. 45.

also, thirdly, consider their invisibility, as another thing which increases our danger from them. When a man sees his enemy, he knows what he is about ; but when his enemy is in the dark, he knows not from which side to expect the blow. An open enemy can be openly resisted ; a secret enemy is more terrible. Now wicked spirits are our enemies ; and, what is worse, our secret enemies. We cannot see them ; we cannot detect them in their operations. Neither, indeed, can we see God, nor can we see Christ, nor the Holy Ghost, nor the holy angels. Doubtless, one reason why God has not enabled us to see much that is wonderful round about us is in mercy ; because, if we were to see it, we should be so overcome by the sight as to be altogether unable to proceed with the ordinary duties of life ; therefore it is that God has hidden it from our eyes. But this should not prevent us from continually keeping in mind that such things and such beings are just as near us, although we are too weak to behold them. And this is the case also with evil spirits : see them we cannot ; but near about us they undoubtedly are, and evermore at hand to tempt us to sin ; very often, indeed, then most near when we least think it.

But, in addition to their number, their unity, and this their invisibility,—in the fourth place, we must not forget what renders them yet more dreadful as enemies, namely, their deceivableness.

Agreeably with this St. Paul says, "Take the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to resist the wiles of the devil." "His wiles;" for the coming of evil spirits, and the manner of their assaulting us, is full of deceit. Accordingly our Saviour says, "He is a liar, and the father of it;"¹ and in another place we read, that "he deceiveth them that dwell on the earth;"² and St. Paul says, "We are not ignorant of his devices;"³ and elsewhere he is spoken of as the power "that blindeth the minds of them that believe not."⁴ Hence, it was by deceit that he tempted and overcame our first parents, and so brought sin into the world: and still by deceit he now "worketh in the children of disobedience;"⁵ so much so, that those who commit sins very often will not even believe that the devil had any influence over them in their sin; and in general, as a man falls away, he disbelieves more and more that there is such a being as the Devil at all—this being one of his devices, to tempt persons on in sin, and not suffer them to think that he is so doing; for if a wicked or careless Christian could once actually know and feel that the Devil was of a certainty leading him on, he would doubtless refuse to proceed. Satan, therefore, and his spirits, in the depth of their deceit, conceal their own power from those on whom they act; and many a man has become most of all the servant of Satan

¹ John viii. 44.² Rev. xiii. 14.³ 2 Cor. ii. 11.⁴ 2 Cor. iv. 4.⁵ Ephes. ii. 2.

while he did not believe even in Satan. Often, likewise, they contrive that men should do evil deeds under the semblance of virtue ; as when it is said that “ Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”¹ Often, too, he is content to lead a man into one habit of vice, such as drunkenness, or swearing, or covetousness, without seeking to make him worse ; knowing that even that one vice, if persisted in, is sufficient for damnation. And, in short, his devices are manifold—a very mystery of iniquity ; so that the perception of them is the very highest proof of a Christian : and none can know them but those who have resisted them, and taken pains to think about them ; whereas those who never so much as give a single thought to them must be ignorant of what most particularly concerns themselves, and will be sure to fall sooner or later into his temptations, and sink under them.

Consider, fifthly, the perseverance of these our innumerable, united, invisible, deceitful enemies. See how, from the beginning of the world, Satan and his angels have persevered in their object, the increase of wickedness amongst men, and the producing a forgetfulness of God ; for what is the whole history of the world, as set forth from first to last in Holy Scripture, but a continuous record of the perseverance of Satan from age to age in endeavouring to ruin mankind ? Witness the fall of Adam, the sinfulness of men till the flood came

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 14.

the wickedness of the descendants of Noah ; witness the idolatry and worshipping of evil spirits, which soon began to prevail ; and then, when the Israelites were chosen as a peculiar people, witness how Satan did not flinch from attacking that very people whom God Himself had set apart, leading them into all kinds of sin ; then when Christ came, he feared not to tempt Christ Himself ; and now that Christ has set up His Church in the world, he has entered the very fold, as a wolf among the sheep, breeding covetousness, disunion, schism, enmity, variance, hatred, even among the very people of God. All these things the enemy hath done, sowing his tares where Christ had sowed only good seed.

This, then, should add to our apprehensions ; and I might go on to mention many other particulars in which the power of these evil spirits, and of Satan their head, is greatly to be dreaded, did not time press ; not but that time itself would fail in enumerating our dangers from this one source.

You see, therefore, that it was not in vain St. Paul warned the Ephesians “to take to themselves the whole armour of God, that they might be able to withstand the wiles of the devil, and to wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world ;” for the utmost amount of preparation, and care, and forethought, and diligence is necessary for every one of us, lest, naturally inclined as we are of ourselves to evil, we should be secretly giving way to some

device of Satan, and so enthrall our souls. We may be assured that such a thing is exceedingly easy; that, in fact, nothing is more easy than to give way to Satan's suggestions, and nothing more difficult than to resist them, whether in thought, word, or action. All through the day a thousand incidents occur to every person in which it is possible for him to fall. How much need, therefore, of humility—of casting away all pride! How much need of working out our salvation with fear and trembling! How much need of seeking the Spirit of Christ! How much need of not trusting in ourselves, but in God; of having our loins girt about with truth; of having on the breastplate of righteousness; of having our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, of taking the shield of faith, whereby we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one! How much need of the helmet of salvation, and of the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God! How much need of praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, both for ourselves and for others! How much need of real Unity amongst Christians, seeing that evil spirits are so united against them! From all which it appears most evident, that, except we are very cautious, and walk with exceeding care, and scrupulousness, and fear of sin, through the whole course of our daily life, we shall undoubtedly fall under the power of Satan; and woe be to us if we so fall, or so far as we have

fallen. David said, "Let me fall into the hand of the Lord, and not into the hand of man." What, then, must be the state of those who fall into the hands, not of man, but of Satan himself?

Such thoughts as these are very requisite at all times; but particularly in these days, when many Christians hardly ever contemplate Satan and his angels as actual powers now existing in the world. Alas, how few are there who think of Satan as they ought to think! How many, in considering their own conduct and way of life, never so much as take into their calculation whether or not, or how far, Satan has now, or ever has had, an influence within them! And leaving out so great an element as this, how can their calculations come right in the end? that is to say, how can they direct the course of their life aright? Surely Holy Scripture has set forth to us the power of Satan and his angels for some great purpose in regard to our souls; and if we never meditate upon that power, nor endeavour to acquaint ourselves with it, the leaving it out from our thoughts will in the end produce a difference in us. Our carelessness and want of real earnestness will by degrees lead us into temptation; and God will not take thought for us, to deliver us from the Evil One, while He sees that we take no thought for ourselves. On the other hand, the really earnest Christian, who values his own soul, will not cease endeavouring to acquaint himself with the length, and breadth, and depth,

and height of Christianity, and with the nature of his own position in the world, in regard to both visible and invisible things; and thus ascertaining the extent of his danger, he will also learn to feel how mighty that power is by which alone he can come off the conqueror—the power, namely, of the Holy Ghost, Who is given him, and Who is able to work exceeding abundantly in us above all that we ask or think. He who lives a daily life of faith and prayer, he who is continually on his guard, he who has weighed well to how great a state he is called, how great things are expected of him, and what a mighty power is given him to work with, or rather to work within him,—he, and he alone, will ever escape the temptations of Satan. All others must fall into his snare, whence year by year it will become more difficult to escape, and at last impossible. From which so dreadful a state may God of His mercy preserve us all; through Christ our Lord! Amen.

SERMON XV.

THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

HEBREWS iii. 13.

“Lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

IT is customary to talk of the ease with which we are deceived by appearances. To be deceived, to find out that we have been deceived, to determine never to be deceived more, and then to be again deceived more than ever,—this is the usual circle in which our life goes round. We are deceived by our hopes; we are deceived by our fears; we are deceived in our views of evil and good; we are deceived in our calculations of what will be best for ourselves and others. We are constantly mistaking things for what they are not. We grasp at objects which we think real, but which, under our very touch, turn into shadows. All things are transformed before our eyes, while we think them the same. Our own senses deceive us: we are deceived in judging of distances; we are deceived in judging

of time ; we often fancy that we hear sounds when all is still ; we mistake one sound for another. Then look further out of yourself into the world which surrounds you. How repeatedly are you finding yourself to have been deceived in many points of which you thought yourself certain at the time ! How constantly are the circumstances of life changing ! Many are deceived by their enemies ; more by their friends. Our very charity is deceived by false objects, and our pity given where it is not deserved. Some persons, it is true, are more sharp-sighted than others, and are not deceived so often ; yet not rarely their very sharp-sightedness deceives them—they overreach their mark.

Hence it is that so many murmurings and complainings have arisen concerning the deceitfulness of things. Men cry out, that the world is full of deceit, that it is a perpetual illusion ; and for a time, while the sting of their disappointment is fresh in them, they think that they can never be again deluded. With this feeling they rise in the morning, and before night discover the very notion, that they could no more be deceived, to have been in itself the greatest deception of all.

There are those doubtless present who more or less have found this to be the case with themselves. Some observe the events of their life less than others, and, in the absence of reflection, may fancy that they have never been deceived. This is

almost a greater deception than all the rest put together. To be deceived again and again by the visible things of this world ; by the invisible workings of our own hearts, and of him within them who is the god of this world : this is the lot of man, this is the experience of all ages. Now we see as through a glass darkly—now we know but in part ; and he who thinks that he is never deceived, is in that very thought his own deceiver.

Seeing, then, that we thus live in a state which is continually subjecting us to deceit of one kind or another, I would, in the next place, call your attention to one particular deceit, which, above all others, is most dangerous, yet least regarded, the deceitfulness of sin ; and, from finding how much we are daily deluded in the common round of our life, let us be prepared to expect that, in this particular also, we may be not a little deceiving ourselves.

The words of our text are, “ Lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” In another place we are told that “ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”¹ And, again, of Satan our Lord declares that he is “ A liar and the father of it.” If there be any one thing to which deceitfulness is attributed by the word of God more than to any thing else, it is to sin. Sin takes a thousand forms of deceit ; she alters her shape so as to suit every human being ; she beguiles men in every variety of ways possible.

¹ Jer. xvii. 9.

All the outward world, all the inward heart, conspire to favour her designs. Sometimes adorned with the garland of pleasure, sometimes clothed in rags and misery, sometimes rolling in wealth and power, now a demon of pride or sloth, now again, transformed into an angel of light,—she continually deludes mankind through every avenue of the senses, the understanding, the affections, and the imagination.

And mark, further, this great and fearful quality in the deceitfulness of sin, wherein it surpasses the deceitfulness of all other things that exist. It is a deceitfulness which the longer continued the more undiscoverable it becomes. Other deceits break up sooner or later; they cannot be supported through a long course of years; they give way of themselves in the end. A child may look at a rainbow, and deem it eternal; but it soon breaks up, and then the deceit is over for once and for ever. He may be deceived again, but not by the same thing. We may be deceived by interested professions of friendship; we may trust to them for a while; but at last the imposture is seen through.

Not so with the deceitfulness of sin. Other impostures contain in themselves the elements of their own decay; but the deceitfulness of sin is progressive. The more it deceives, the greater becomes its power of deceiving. Every fresh deception opens the eyes in other cases: in sin it but closes them the more. This progressive influence of sin is

remarkably expressed in the words of our text: "Lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." What does the expression "hardened" in this place teach us, but that the more a person deceives himself in sinning, the more he becomes hardened in being so deceived? The more he is deceived by sin, the less power he has to detect the imposture. Every fresh accession of sin, instead of softening his conscience, and making it sensitive, and enabling him to detect the deception, is only hardening it more and more, till at last the very eyes of his soul are covered over, so to say, with a film or crust, which goes on to thicken till he cannot see through it. "Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have."¹ "Seeing, he cannot see; hearing, he cannot hear." His sin has become its own punishment; it has spread like a cancer or gangrene, encrusting the conscience over: he has become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. When he could see, he would not look; now he cannot see if he would. Here, then, begins from this time the entire dominion of sin in the human soul. By its deceivableness it has conquered and gained the victory; it has spread unawares; it has grown up by degrees while it was not watched. First it deceived a little, then it hardened a little; then it deceived more, then it hardened more; then it deceived again, then it hardened again; and so

¹ Luke viii. 18.

on, deceiving and hardening, hardening and deceiving, till the man's soul is become altogether blinded. The very blaze of the glorious gospel of Christ is no light to him. He gropes in darkness, guided only by a corrupted moral nature, the blind leading the blind; a thick and palpable and more than Egyptian gloom becomes his self-inflicted destiny for the rest of his life, unless he be awakened by some special intervention of God's grace. Through this darkness he plunges on from step to step, till, unawares and unexpected, a light at last does break upon him;—but what light? not the light of the pure gospel; not the mild beaming radiance of a happy eternity; but the light of the flames which cannot be quenched, the blaze of that torment which ascendeth up for ever and ever.

Then comes that fearful time when the Almighty will say, “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.”¹

¹ Prov. i. 24-29.

Here then we behold the ultimate consequences of the deceitfulness of sin ; and from hence is manifest the excellence of the Apostle's warning, that we beware of it in time.

If there is one point in which the deceitfulness of sin consists more than another, it is this, that it comes on by little and little. Remember, it was by night, while men slept, that the tares were sown. Even so now many persons are in the habit of not marking the small particulars, the little items of their sins. They habitually indulge themselves in little things which they know to be wrong. They count nothing of these brief particular acts. Each in turn is quickly forgotten, and passes away from the mind. They are content to know that, on the whole, they commit a number of trifling sins. The thought does not frighten them. It is the common course of their life ; and no man is alarmed by the common course of his life. Thus the greater number of persons of all classes, high and low, rich and poor, suffer themselves to go on ; satisfied to be aware, as a general fact, that they omit many good deeds, and commit many small sins. In this they willingly allow themselves ; regarding what they consider to be their petty daily transgressions, their petty daily omissions, their petty daily forgetfulnesses of God, as things which ever have been, and ever must be—as things which it is as well to forget, as flakes of snow which melt into the earth as they fall, and are no longer seen. Alas, if such

careless persons could but for one moment see and understand that not one of these little sins is really melted away! Remember, for every idle word an account must be given: how much more for every careless action and thought! These little sins, which you are in the habit of contentedly committing every day of your life, and satisfying yourself with not even the miserable pittance of a general repentance,—these little trivial items, which day by day you neglect, are not sinking into the earth, as you falsely suppose. No! rather they are gathering up into a pyramid over your head: not one of them is forgotten, not one of them is extinct. “He that despiseth little things, shall perish by little and little.”¹ “Be not deceived: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” Even “the righteous shall scarcely be saved.” All Scripture conspires to shew that the being saved is one of the extraordinary and uncommon things which is not granted to the generality of mankind. If great crimes, and great crimes only, such as murder, condemned men to hell, then would those who find their way to eternal life be ten times more in number than those who find their way to eternal death; for the greater part of mankind never commit glaring crimes. Yet our Saviour Himself has said, “Few there be that find the narrow way.” Since, then, it is the many that perish, the few that are saved; since few commit great

¹ Ecclus. xix. 1.

crimes, and yet many perish ; let every man learn that it is not only great crimes which condemn to hell. No, my brethren : “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all that forget God.” It is by little and little that men perish ; by little habits of sin consciously indulged, by little forgetfulnesses of God, by little errors, by little vices ; if, indeed, any thing can truly be termed little which is of the nature of sin.

Mark, I beseech you, how even in the very order of nature all things proceed and are completed by little and little. By little and little the shadows alter their places, the sun rises and sinks, the stars appear and disappear—you cannot see them come or go. By little and little the fruits of the earth grow in their kinds. By little and little the seasons melt one into another : winter into spring, spring into summer, summer into autumn. By little and little the tides rise and fall. By little and little the world itself moves round. By little and little day is transformed into night ; night into morning. By little and little the clouds change their shapes ; you see that they are changed, yet you cannot see them changing at each moment. All things go on by little and little ; this is the order of God’s providence. Time itself passes away to each of us by little and little ; it is not marked as it passes. Thus all things steal on in their course ; they steal on by little and little, and men mark it not ; they steal on each to its end,

and that end to perish—winter to perish in spring, spring to perish in summer, summer to perish in autumn, day to perish in night, night to perish in morning, the shadows to perish in darkness, the clouds to perish in rain, the sea to perish in drought, the earth to perish in fire, the stars to perish into the skies, time to perish into eternity.

Seeing, then, that all things thus by little and little are hastening to their end, and that end to perish, let not men be surprised to hear that it is also by little and little that mankind perish: by little and little their souls consume away, through the deceitfulness of sin; till in the end they are called to their account, and can bring forward nothing else but a long catalogue of thousands of petty sins continually indulged in: petty, that is to say, petty and trifling in their own eyes, but a fearful mountain of crime in His sight who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, who has said, “Be ye holy, for I am holy;” fearful when considered as an evidence of their want of real faith in Christ, and earnestness in religion; more fearful still when regarded as having sinfully engrossed portions of time which were given them that they might work out their salvation with fear and trembling, instead of living indifferent, lukewarm, content with themselves, careless of little sins, and satisfied with a formal repentance, like the rest of the world.

Learn, then, to doubt yourself. Be warned in

time. Better to live for ever in anxiety about your daily sins than to become hardened. Sift and examine your works and your ways. Search into your evil habits, and minor unknown transgressions; and pray for the gift of repentance. If you can discover few sins, pray that you may discover more. Be certain, be sure that they are many; and if you cannot see them, it is only because so far you are already hardened, or at least becoming hardened, through the deceitfulness of sin.

Above all, pray to God for His Holy Spirit to take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and to unclothe your eyes to your real state by any means. Better to endure all human afflictions—pain, grief, poverty, disease, the loss of every hope of life—rather than be contented with remaining what you are. Be ever making a continual effort after holiness. Seek for the transformation of your whole heart and soul. Struggle to become better. Imitate Christ and His saints; and when all this is done, God only knows how much unseen sin remains, and with what difficulty you shall inherit glory.

SERMON XVI.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PAST.

ECCLESIASTES iii. 15.

“ God requireth that which is past.”

THERE is a truth, connected with the past, upon which the more we meditate the more fearful it appears: I mean, its irrevocable character,—the fact that it cannot be recalled—that what has been done by us has been done for ever—that what has been said by us has been said for ever, and cannot be unsaid—that even the thoughts of our hearts, whatever thoughts we may have had through the whole course of our lives, however unheard by man, are yet registered in the unalterable past, and have not perished, but remain there, reserved till that great day when the thoughts of all hearts shall be revealed.

This idea of the irreversible past has been more or less dwelt upon, even by those ancient philosophers and poets who knew nothing of Revelation nor of the Day of Judgment; even to them this life which we now live appeared full of mystery

and wonder. They perceived evidently that what is past of it is irrevocable ; they looked back on their lives, and saw thousands of deeds done which could not be undone, those deeds running into consequences beyond their control, those consequences germinating into other consequences still to come. Thus they found themselves burdened with responsibilities more than they could bear ; to escape from which they laid down the doctrine of fatality, and threw the burden off themselves upon a supposititious destiny.

We, my brethren, are not driven to this view, to relieve ourselves from the irrevocable past : we know that God has provided an offering most pure, most spotless, most holy, for the sins of the whole world, even His only Son, Jesus Christ, begotten from all Eternity. We know that, on our sincere repentance, He who for our sakes became “ a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” will take upon Himself the burden of all that is past in our lives. Nevertheless, I conceive that Christianity has placed us in a position in which the past is become a matter of still greater fearfulness to us than even to the heathens of old ; for if, on the one hand, Revelation has declared to us a Mediator between God and man, on the other hand, it has opened to us a wider and more certain range for contemplation in regard to a Judgment to come : we perceive more clearly than they did, that the life which we now live is part and portion with

another yet future, and that the consequences of our past irrevocable deeds run not only over the whole of this life, but also into that future existence which awaits us—nay, will prove inconceivably greater, more vast, and more weighty, in the world to come than in this present life.

The true reason of the importance which attaches to our past life is given in the text: “God requireth that which is past.” If it were not that God requireth what is past, then our past deeds might well sink into oblivion. But all Scripture assures us that this is not the case,—that every man, on the contrary, shall stand before Christ, and give account of his past deeds, whether they were good, or whether they were evil.

In considering these words, we find two subjects for our contemplation: first, “that which is past;” secondly, that “God requireth it.” Let us meditate upon these in their turn; and may the Holy Spirit be with us meanwhile, opening our hearts to a sense of what is past in our own lives, that we may learn to humble ourselves and redeem the time.

First, then, let us contemplate “that which is past.” And for this purpose put yourself in the position of a person advanced in years, who has lived negligently in former days, but now beginning to see Christianity in its true light, looks back on the years that are gone, with a view, by God’s grace, of repenting in those points where he has

offended. Now what is the order in which his contemplations will spring up, on turning his thoughts backwards with this view? Of course, there will be a difference with men in this respect, according to the original nature of their minds; but I should suppose, if he attempted to reflect clearly on the subject, his views would rise up in some such order as the following:—

First, then, on looking back upon his former life, and stirring up his memory to search into it, he would find himself gazing down as it were from some eminence, upon a long line of confused scenes; he would behold as in a maze beneath his feet all the events of his past years running inextricably one into another,—past thoughts, past plans, past deeds, past motives, past joys, past sorrows, past hopes, past fears,—so mingled up one with another, that he would feel almost prompted to close his eyes upon the scene, and give up as a vain attempt the hope of reducing it to some order. However, if he still kept his memory on the stretch, and revived it by all possible means, then by slow degrees the past scenes of his life would lay themselves out into some sort of method and connexion; his former deeds and motives would separate off into their proper places, and attach themselves to the parts to which they belonged; the consequences of various actions done through his life would become arranged in their due series and concatenations; the things of his infancy would be no longer confused with those

of his boyhood ; the thoughts and actions of his boyhood would arrange themselves and stand apart from those of his later age. Still not so as for these portions of his life to appear separate existences : he would see that his infancy had contained the germ of his boyhood, as his boyhood that of his manhood ; that the former had exerted thousands of influences on the latter—influences unseen at the time, but now clear as the face of day. Above all, if he looked closely and candidly into the past scenes of his life now laid out before him, he would soon perceive one common principle running through the whole and assimilating it in all its parts : I mean, the principle of sin, working along its course through all the vicissitudes of his existence, intruding into all his deeds and motives, and thrusting itself continually even between himself and his God. These things would be clear to him now ; he would see the effects of even one sinful habit upon many years of his life,—how its indulgence had caused him to be blind in other things—how sin had generated sin from one year to another, and kept him away from the things that belonged to his peace. Then, indeed, he would be inclined to shut his eyes upon the sight of so many disclosed deformities of his more secret life, known only to himself and to God. Then, indeed, he would be ready to exclaim, “ Oh, wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? ”¹ And

¹ Rom. vii. 24.

now, as at every moment fresh deeds of long-forgotten sin emerged to view, how would he begin to shudder at the various memories which, concealed for a long time by the hardness of his heart, at last, by the power of Christianity, struggle up to light from the abyss of his past days! Even those deeds which to all appearance were good at the time, yet now, on presenting themselves, would come forward tainted with the sinfulness of their motives, in which there had been no faith to sanctify them and make them acceptable.

But another reflection now crowds upon him, with which perhaps he may console himself. "It is true," he thinks to himself, "it is true, it must be confessed with grief and shame, that my deeds, my motives, my very thoughts, have been evil and sinful, thousands and thousands of times; but, thanks be to God, they have been confined to myself. They have not gone beyond myself. I have worked my own evil; but I have injured no other creature."

Vain hope! presumptuous supposition! "Thou hast injured no other creature!" Let even the best and holiest of men stand forward and say this if he dare. No, my brethren; this can be said by no one who is awake to a true sense of his past deeds, and their infinite consequences. We are social beings. We are constituted in one body. Each is affected by the example of the other. The

power of example is a power which, when once exerted, cannot be recalled. In the course of our lives we meet with hundreds, and converse with them, and give them our examples, in opinions, in courses of action, in habits of various kinds. These men go away, and we never meet them again on this side the grave. They go away; they carry our examples with them,—if good, presently to be forgotten; if sinful, long to be remembered. The more sinful, the more contagious. Experience proves, as a matter of fact, that one such momentary example of sin set by another has led a man into entire courses of crime, lasting to the end of his days. He, therefore, who sets one evil example is putting in force a power which he cannot stop. He is like one who turns loose in the middle of a city a number of wild beasts, over which he has no further control. He is like one who introduces the plague into a country where it did not before exist, which even in one day spreads and extends beyond his reach, carried away where he never dreamt, transferred from one to another, and handed down, perhaps, as a miserable heirloom, even to remote posterities.

Such would be the view of his various sinful habits, which would thrust itself upon the person whose case we are supposing. He would see that his past sins had not been confined to himself; but, agreeably to the very nature of sin, had spread and been disseminated amongst others, now beyond his

reach, now perhaps laid in the grave, past hope, and past repentance.

Oh, in what a sad, and melancholy, and funereal garb would his past life then array itself, in the place of its former false glitter; and still more, when this further reflection occurs to him, namely, how innumerable his acts have been! He can, indeed, remember much of the evil deeds of former years; but can he remember them all? No! he knows that an immense number baffle all powers of memory. So that, repent as he may of what he remembers, still the greater number he cannot repent of in particular, because he cannot remember them in particular.

Then, too, comes another thought: all these innumerable unremembered deeds, running into unknown and illimitable consequences, are equally, with what he remembers, irrevocable. Not one of them can be recalled. They have been done for once and for ever. They are separated from him by the adamantine barriers of the past. Oh, if he but might, how would he dash himself headlong through those barriers, and hurry with the speed of lightning back over the scenes of his former life, and undo his past deeds! He has even a strange impulse to do so. But he knows well that it is impossible. What is done, is done for ever; what is past, is past for evermore.

But now comes the thought,—a thought full of fear,—though it be past for ever to himself, who is

a creature of time, is it indeed past for ever to Him who is Lord of eternity, to whom past, present, and future are as one? What says Ecclesiastes on this point, in the words preceding our text? He says, that to God "that which has been is now." As this comes to the mind of the person whose case we are supposing, it seems to wind up his former reflections, concerning his past actions, into a climax. He sees now, and sees with a mysterious dread, that innumerable and unremembered as his former deeds are to himself, they are not so with God. To God they are known, reckoned up, and numbered exactly; not only each in itself, but each in all its secret results. With God they are ever present; to God the past never dies; to Eternity there is no past or future; and God "inhabith Eternity." Every past deed, therefore, lives with Him now; lives with Him for ever. Wonderful, mysterious, awful life, which the past is thus seen to possess with God! And this is the case with your past deeds, my brethren; with the past deeds of him who now addresses you; with all our past deeds, of whatever possible sort or number;—and "God requireth that which is past."

God requireth it. God demands it at our hands. Here, then, since the matter is brought so near to each of us, let us leave that case which we have been supposing, and consider our own position.

"God requireth that which is past." What

fearful language is this! He knows that our past deeds have run out into events which we did not foresee, affecting both ourselves and others; He knows them to be so innumerable that our memory is paralysed in the attempt to reckon them up; He knows that each of these deeds is clearly weighed and reckoned with all its secret consequences by Himself, and is ever present with Him in a sort of eternal existence; He knows that to ourselves they are irrevocable; that we cannot go back into the past and undo it, and restore it again as it was at the first. And yet knowing all this concerning our deeds, He, nevertheless, requires them at our hands: "God requireth that which is past." Oh, how shall we answer so fearful a requisition, how shall we meet so terrible a demand! In our own merits, in our own righteousness? God forbid. "Who may abide the day of His coming? Who shall stand when He appeareth?"¹ There is but one way, if we would be saved. To that one way we are driven, we are forced, if we possess a true sense of what is irrevocably past in our lives. That way God, in His great mercy, has prepared for us—that way is open to all: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."² Throw thy burden of all that is past, throw it, in faith and heartfelt repentance, upon Him whom "God made sin for thee, that thou mightest become the righteousness of God in Him."

¹ Mal. iii. 2.

² Acts xvi. 31.

The very nature of the unalterable past points to a Mediator. There, in the Sacrifice of a Being infinitely great and infinitely holy, who, dwelling in Eternity, needed not to have died, yet for our sakes “humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross,”¹ “tasting death for every man,”²—there we behold what is evil in the past wiped away, and what is good received as good; through the righteousness of Him who died for us and rose again, “whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past.”³

Thrice-blessed consolation to him who reflects with sorrow and anguish on what has been sinful in his life! God requires of him the past; and when he searches in vain for any thing to offer that God can accept otherwise than in anger, behold God has given His Only-begotten Son to meet this requisition, and asks no more in return but the sacrifice of a troubled spirit. “A broken and contrite heart He will not despise.”

Oh, amazing forgiveness of God towards His fallen creatures! Oh, let us strive to obtain this forgiveness! Let us seek after a living faith in our Saviour. Let us labour for a sincere repentance of former sins. And for this purpose, let us earnestly pray God, by the unseen power of His Holy Spirit, to illuminate our minds, and shew us

¹ Philip. ii. 8.

² Heb. ii. 9.

³ Rom. iii. 25.

the dark spots in our former life, of which there may be many more than we suspect.

This if we do, then what was sinful in our past days shall be as though it had never been; and in respect to past joys and happiness, which we are accustomed to speak of as gone by for ever and never to return, a day is coming when the same mercy which forgives what was sinful, shall revive what was happy. The past, deprived of its sting, shall be restored again as at the first; not again to pass away like a tale that is told, but as an immortal creation, free from all sin and sorrow. For "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."¹

¹ Rev. xxi. 4.

SERMON XVII.

SIN A SEARCHER OUT.

NUMBERS xxxii. 23.

“ Be sure your sin will find you out.”

THE occasion on which these words were first used was when, on arriving at the Jordan, after forty years' journeying in the wilderness, the Reubenites and Gadites had engaged with Moses not to settle on one side of the river without assisting to establish the rest of their nation on the other side. Moses had feared lest these two tribes, having once obtained a home, might desert the rest. As a condition, therefore, of his consent to their establishing themselves, he made them promise that they would send across a proportion of armed men to assist their comrades; then lest, having made this engagement, they should ever be tempted to break it, he added this warning: “ Be sure your sin will find you out;” that is, “ If you break this covenant which you have now made with me, and, through

me, with the Almighty, you will then have committed a great sin, and you may be certain that the sin so committed will be visited upon you sooner or later." This warning seems to have had its effect; for it does not appear that they broke the covenant then made, rather they seem to have observed it religiously; and doubtless they found a blessing from their obedience.

The same words may also serve as a warning to ourselves, who in our baptism have entered into a covenant with God, and were signed with the sign of the Cross, "in token that hereafter we should not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner, against sin, the world, and the devil, continuing Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto our life's end." Well, indeed, would it be for all of us, if we also would take alarm from the solemn words of our text, and weigh their truth, and, while it is in our power, forsake those sins which beset us, the end of which, if we do not repent and amend, must be our everlasting ruin.

Now the meaning of these words, "Be sure your sin will find you out," as applied to ourselves, I take to be this: that whatever sins we indulge in, we may be perfectly persuaded that, as no good action is in vain, and without its reward, so neither is any sinful action without its punishment; but in the end, whatever we now think, the penalty for it will overtake us, according to the nature

of the action ; and thus our sin may be said to find us out, or discover us. Too many commit sins, and having committed them, never think of them afterwards ; they lose sight of them, and seem in thought to have escaped from them : but in the end it is found to be otherwise. It is as though a man had escaped from prison : for a time he is at large ; he thinks himself safe ; he persuades himself that the officers of justice have lost sight of him ; but at last, when perhaps he thinks himself safest, they find him out and seize him. So likewise does sin—it also finds out its victim in the end, and avenges itself upon him.

You see, then, that these words of Moses teach us a most important truth concerning the nature of sin, namely, the faculty which it has of finding out and avenging itself upon the sinner in the end. And the same truth, although in different words, is declared in many parts of Scripture ; as, for instance, in those words of Ecclesiastes : “ God requireth that which is past ;”¹ and again, “ Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear the Lord ; but it shall not be well with the wicked ;”² and again, in the New Testament, “ The Son of man shall reward every man according to his works ;”³ and St. Paul, comparing sinful actions to the sowing of seed, says, “ Be not deceived ; whatsoever a man soweth, that

¹ Eccles. iii. 15.

² Id. viii. 12.

³ Matt. xvi. 27.

shall he also reap. He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.”¹ That is to say, “So surely as different plants spring up naturally, according to the difference in the seeds sown, so surely every sin, little or great, shall bear its own fruit.” The thought of this, did we but seriously consider, would make us very careful in two respects: first, to repent of the “evil deeds which from time to time we have most grievously committed;” secondly, to be cautious how we fall into the same sins again: for we may be persuaded, that unless we do most deeply and truly repent us of our sins, they cannot be blotted out, but still are, as it were, searching after our souls, and will find us out in the end.

Let us now consider in what respects it is that sin fulfils the character here given it, of finding out the sinner.

First, then, sin finds out sinners in this respect, that it is the nature of sin, unless repented of and forsaken, to lead on to more and to greater sins; and then these greater sins lead on, in turn, to a more severe punishment. A man, for instance, neglects keeping the Sunday holy;—now this seems to him perhaps no very great sin; but by this means he becomes acquainted, it may be, with wicked companions; from them he learns to swear and to be drunken, and, becoming more vicious, joins them in deeds of theft and robbery; and so,

¹ Gal. vi. 8.

from step to step, is led on by Satan to the gallows, —all because he began with neglecting that command of God, to “Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy.” Thus, as a little money well disposed of in merchandise produces more, and this more again ; so a little sin indulged paves the way for greater sins, and, these greater sins bringing their punishment, the first sin, which led to them, thus finds out the sinner in the end.

Many persons, when enticed to commit a sin, think to themselves, “It will be no harm to do it this once ;” but they find out afterwards that it was a great harm ; for having been done once, it becomes easier to be done a second time ; and having been done a second time, it becomes easier to be done a third time ; and by doing it often, a habit is formed ; and when once a man has formed a habit of committing a sin, then, unless God in His great mercy check him, he will go on presumptuously, becoming, like Pharaoh, more and more hardened ; and should he die in that state, he cannot be saved. This, then, is one way in which sin finds out the sinner : namely, because every sin which a man commits not only contracts guilt of itself, but, as it were, bears fruit, by increasing his disposition towards further sinning ; and these further sins bring the punishment for the first sin.

Another way in which sin finds out the sinner is this : that even in this life men very often suffer for their sins ; and that in two ways : either by

the actual consequences which their sins entail upon them, or by the internal remorse which they occasion.

How often does it occur, for instance, that sins committed in youth do not exhibit their effects till late in life, after having lain long hid! A man when young gives way to profligate conduct. As he grows older, he perhaps forsakes those particular sins. But still, so far as this life is concerned, their consequences remain; and at the age of forty or fifty, when other men are hale, he finds himself with a worn-out constitution, unable to go about his business, diseased in body and mind. Or, it may be, a man yielding to temptation in early life, commits some act of dishonesty; and having committed it, after a while he almost forgets all about it. Yet often, even after many years, that act of his turns up, so to say, and becomes known, and he suffers shame and disgrace for it, and his children after him. Even in those cases where no external consequences follow, yet very often the mere internal remorse is intolerable: so that men have committed murder, and there was no witness, neither could any thing be proved against them; yet, after, it may be, twenty or even thirty years, they have been known to feel such extraordinary agony of mind, on thinking over the deed done long ago, that, not urged by religious considerations, they have, out of pure weariness of life, delivered themselves up to justice; the sin which they had committed

hunting and pursuing them from year to year as though it were an evil spirit, and not being satisfied till it had satiated itself in their blood.

Thus frequently, even in this life, sin finds out the sinner ; not by any chance, but agreeably to the secret ordinance of God. And even if persons escape altogether in this life, both from punishment and from remorse of mind, yet such an enduring power is there in sin, and so certain is it in its effects, that it follows the sinner into the very world to come. It dies not with his death, but seeking after his soul, and pursuing it beyond the uttermost parts of the earth, through the very valley of the shadow of death, it ceases not till in the end it finds him out, and seizes upon him, even though it be before the very throne of God. Thus, let a man escape ever so easily in this life, yet, at the Day of Judgment, his sins, great and little, will appear ; and Satan, who tempted him to them, will testify against him, and demand his soul. For if there be any thing plain and undoubted in holy Scripture it is this, that God “hath appointed a day on the which He will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom He hath ordained.”¹

Be sure, then, whoever you are, who are in the habit of committing wilful sins, that, unless you repent and amend, those sins will find you out in the end, whether they are secret sins which the world cannot see, or public sins committed before

¹ Acts xvii. 31.

the eyes of mankind ; whether they are such sins as “are open before-hand, going before to judgment,” or such as “follow after.”¹ You may escape in this life, although even that is not probable ; but most certainly you will not escape in the life to come : for then the judgment will be set, the books will be opened ; then will be the incorruptible Judge, the horrible judgment-seat, the answer without excuse, the inevitable charges, the shameful punishment, the unquenchable flame, the unwearied worm, the indissoluble chains, the inconsolable cry, none to stand by thee, none to plead for thee, unless in this life thou hast repented and cast thy sins from thee, and sought thy Lord while He might be found.

Let such thoughts, concerning the unavoidable consequences of unrepented sin, alarm us out of that heedless state in which too many of us live. And as to those who seem to sin on without check, let it not be thought that God will suffer them to escape. Certainly their sin will find them out at last. In the times of David there were many such, men who corrupted others, and spake wicked blasphemy ; who said, “Tush, how shall God perceive it ; is there knowledge in the Most High ?”² And that such persons should be allowed to exist caused David to wonder, and led him for a time almost to doubt the providence of God. But “when he went into the sanctuary, then he understood the end of those men ; namely, how God

¹ 1 Tim. v. 24.

² Ps. lxxiii. 11.

doth set them in slippery places, and casteth down and destroyeth them. Oh, how suddenly do they consume, perish, and come to a fearful end!" Such is the case with sinners, who seem to go on a long time in their sins, and to suffer no punishment. They are walking in slippery places; and so much the greater will be their fall in the end, in proportion to their security now.

To conclude, let us thank God that, whatever our own sins may have been, He hath not yet given us over to a reprobate mind; but that it is still in our power to turn unto Him. Let us, whilst we condemn others, take heed lest we ourselves fall. Let us be alive to the particular temptations which our own dispositions and occupations most naturally bring before us. Let us pray that we may not be led into temptation, and let us keep ourselves out of it.

SERMON XVIII.

RETRIBUTION.

2 KINGS x. 10.

“ Know now that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of the Lord, which the Lord spake concerning the house of Ahab : for the Lord hath done that which He spake by His servant Elijah.”

THIS is now the third Sunday upon which we have been engaged with the history of King Ahab. A fortnight since you heard the inspired account of Ahab's sinful act in regard to Naboth's vineyard ; together with the judgment which Elijah denounced against him, his guilty wife, and all his family. To-day you have had brought before you the final completion of that judgment in the destruction, by Jehu, of Ahab's seventy sons, and of all the kindred that remained to him.

This subject, therefore, having occupied so much of our attention in the reading of the lessons, it will be well to meditate upon it, and consider what important truths it conveys to us.

Ahab is described in Scripture as the most wicked king of Israel. He was the son of Omri, "who wrought evil in the sight of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him."¹ And, again, of Ahab himself it is said: "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, above all that were before him; and as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. . . . And Ahab made a grove: and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him."² And further on we read: "There was none like Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up; and he did very abominably in following idols."³

It is impossible for a person to give himself up to a life of general irreligion, contempt of God, and self-indulgence, but that sooner or later Satan will provide for him some special temptation. A person may have suffered his heart to become corrupt, and for a while may not appear outwardly to be different; but it will not be long before an occasion will arise, and then, in some outward action, his inward corruption will manifest itself. Thus it is that sometimes a murder, or some very dreadful act, will be committed by a man who, up

¹ 1 Kings xvi. 25. ² 1 Kings xvi. 30. ³ 1 Kings xxi. 26.

till the very time, had a respectable character; upon which people wonder how so apparently good a man came to commit such a deed; the truth being, that in reality, for a long while before, his secret heart had been withdrawing from God, and God from him.

Ahab had for a long time been departing from God. Although by birth an Israelite, and one of that race who had been signally warned against giving way to the worship of idols, he was by choice an idolater, and had already established in his dominions the religion of Baal. His general wickedness was now about to break out into a notable crime of injustice and murder; for God does not check those who presumptuously choose to go on in a course of departure from Him.

“It came to pass,” we read, “after these things” (that is, after Ahab, contrary to the express command of God by His prophet, had let go Benhadad, whom God had appointed to utter destruction), “Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, the worth of it in money.”¹ To understand what follows, we must bear in mind that Ahab had two palaces,—one at Samaria, where the seat of government was,—the other at Jezreel, some miles

¹ 1 Kings xxi. 1, 2.

from Samaria, and serving as a country retirement. This country palace, then, requiring some increase to its grounds, and Naboth's vineyard lying close at hand, Ahab desired that he might have it for "a garden of herbs."

Surprise is sometimes felt at the rejection of this offer by Naboth, especially as the proposal of exchange or purchase appears fair enough; and his refusal is thought to be a needless insisting on his own rights. Naboth, however, did not refuse to give up his vineyard on any other than a religious ground. "God forbid," he says, "that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." Land was reckoned among the Jews as a kind of sacred property; and the solemn transmission of it from father to son was almost a part of their religion. In this, therefore, he acted rightly.

Upon his refusal, the history goes on to say that Ahab "came into his house heavy and displeased." He had set his heart upon the vineyard of his poor neighbour, and could not brook the refusal. He had forgotten the command, "Thou shalt not covet." Here it was that his sin had its beginning. Observing his sadness, his wife Jezebel came to him, and said unto him, "Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?" "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

Then sending letters to the nobles of Jezreel,

who seem to have had no fear of God before their eyes, or, if they feared God, to have feared man more, she instructed them to bring false witnesses against Naboth, saying, "Naboth did blaspheme God and the king." "Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died." In the death of righteous Naboth we are reminded of the death of Stephen, the first martyr: both died in the same dreadful way—namely, by stoning, which was an ancient Jewish punishment; both also died unjustly, and while contending for God's truth. The shedding of innocent blood may be forgotten and passed over amongst men; but it is remembered with God, and is sure to bring a fearful retribution: like that of Abel, it cries from the ground, and ceases not, until vengeance be completed on the guilty.

Such thoughts as these, however, were far from Jezebel. We read, "It came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead." Thus she spoke in the pride of her heart; and Ahab heard, and whether he had been partaker beforehand in the scheme for Naboth's death, does not appear; but, at any rate, he had heard her boastful promise, "I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth," and must have known what that meant; and might have saved him, had

he pleased. Now, however, by taking advantage of the murder, he consents to it, and shares its guilt with Jezebel; for it is said, "when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth, to take possession of it." It was, indeed, now his own; for Naboth having been executed on a charge of high-treason, his lands became from that time confiscated to the crown; especially as not only Naboth himself had been put to death, but every one of his sons also.¹

Then it was that the awful judgment of God against Ahab was pronounced by Elijah, meeting him face to face in that same vineyard. "Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity." And of Jezebel he said, "the dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." This prophecy was signally fulfilled in no long space of time.

The death of Ahab himself took place within two years. We read that in fighting against Syria, he disguised himself, and went into the battle. He had been already forewarned by Micaiah; but he thought by this disguise to escape. In the midst of the battle a certain man drew a bow at a venture; that is, he shot an arrow, not aiming at any person in particular, but leaving it to take its

¹ 2 Kings ix. 26.

chance amongst the enemy. That arrow, guided by the curse of God, smote Ahab between the joints of his armour. The blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot, and was afterwards licked up by dogs at the pool of Samaria.

But the decree of vengeance had gone forth, not only against Ahab, but against his wife, and all his family. Upon his death, his son Ahaziah came to the throne; but within one year it is recorded that "Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber,"¹ of which accident he died; agreeably to the secret course of events already laid down in God's providence.

To Ahaziah succeeded Jehoram, another son of Ahab, of whom we read that "he wrought evil in the sight of the Lord." He reigned twelve years. But a thousand years with God are as one day; and His purposes are without repentance. What was delayed twelve years came at last with the greater force. During this interval God had been preparing a great avenger, for the express purpose of completing the retribution denounced by Elijah. This avenger was Jehu. He was solemnly anointed for the office by a young man of the prophets, who, at the command of Elisha, poured oil on his head and said, "Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord, and thou shalt smite the house of Ahab, thy master; and the whole house of Ahab shall perish,

¹ 2 Kings i. 2.

and the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her."¹

And now the vengeance of God followed in acts of rapid succession. First Jehoram is slain. "Jehu," we read, "drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms, and the arrow went out at his heart." Afterwards his body was taken up and cast into the very field of Naboth the Jezreelite, for the sake of which Ahab had sinned.

Next after him perished the wicked Jezebel. Her end was fearful exceedingly. She was thrown down from a window into the street, and was there trampled to death under the horses of Jehu. "They threw her down," we read, "and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses; and he trode her under foot." This was at Jezreel. Then after a while, sending to bury her, they found no more of her left by the dogs than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands.

In the first lesson for to-day we have the conclusion of the history. Ahab, by his wives and concubines, had seventy sons yet remaining. They were under the care of guardians at Samaria, to whom Jehu wrote from Jezreel, "Take ye the heads of your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel by to-morrow this time." "And it came to pass, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's

¹ 2 Kings ix. 10.

sons and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them to Jezreel. And Jehu said, Lay ye them in two heaps at the entering in of the gate." Thus by the gate of Naboth's own city were now laid the heads of seventy sons of Ahab, at the very spot where Naboth had been stoned; and Jehu said, "Know that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of the Lord, which He spake concerning the house of Ahab: for the Lord hath done that which He spake by His servant Elijah. Then Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining." Again, when he came to Samaria, "he slew all that remained unto Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed him, according to the saying of the Lord, which he spake to Elijah."

Now it may be said, that this is indeed a wonderful history to read; but, it may be asked, what do we learn from it?

I reply, then, that first we learn from it the danger of covetousness, of setting our hearts upon any thing belonging to our neighbours. It was in this that Ahab's sin began.

Again, we learn from this history, the dreadful guilt of spilling innocent blood, or of being an accomplice in it. The blood of Abel "cried from the ground;"¹ the blood of prophets and righteous men rose up against the Jews; above all, the

¹ Gen. iv. 10.

blood of Christ visited them and their children, in the destruction of their city and themselves. And here we see how the blood of Naboth was requited with blood, and how truly in his case those words were fulfilled, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."¹ He, indeed, when he heard Elijah's curse, "rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted;" but he obtained thereby no escape for himself, and only this favour, that his family should perish in his son's days, and not in his own.

Again, we learn from this history the dreadful consequences of a single sin; and we see how the Divine retribution worked its own end, till it left neither root nor branch. Hence we may judge what caution is requisite against falling into any one deliberate sin, as not knowing what extent of retribution it may bring upon us; for every sin is of a nature to be followed up either in this life, or in the life to come, by its due punishment.

Again, as to those of us who, in the time past of our lives, have given way to any habitual sin, however secret, we should seriously consider that there remaineth no second baptism for sin; and that if we wish to escape its consequences, the only path left open to us is repentance and its works. This, therefore, should be a continual question with us, Is my repentance deep, and from the heart? Have I utterly forsaken those sins? Do

¹ Gen. ix. 6.

I deny myself, and have revenge against myself, in consequence? Am I diligent, to the utmost amount of my time, in seeking, through Christ, forgiveness of God, by endeavouring to please Him?

Alas, such thoughts, it is to be feared, are strange to many of us; and so far from endeavouring to wash out past sins by works of repentance, too many go on heedlessly adding to their number, and increasing the unseen heap of damnation which lies at their doors. And some who have greatly sinned think that now there can be no harm in adding one fresh sin more to the quantity which is already so large, forgetting that nothing is in vain; that as there are different states of glory, each higher than the other, so also there are different states of damnation, each deeper than the other: from which it follows, that it is possible for a person, by adding sin to sin, to increase his damnation; it being certain that as there is no limit to the height of heaven, so is there no bound to the depth of hell.

May God, of His mercy, open the eyes of those who are in this state before it is too late, that they may behold the dreadful extent of their danger. And to those of us who, having committed sins in former years, repent of them, and remember them with anguish, may He increase His great gift of repentance, that it may work in us those effects which are necessary to be attained before we go thither where no repentance may be found.

In the mean while we have those blessed words for our comfort : “ The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit ; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”¹ Let us therefore “ humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt us in due time.”² “ Let us judge ourselves that we be not judged.”³ Let us descend in our own sight, that we may rise in the sight of God and of His angels. Let us abase ourselves here, that we may be lifted up with Christ hereafter.

¹ Ps li. 17.

² 1 Peter v. 6.

³ 1 Cor. xi. 31.

SERMON XIX.

CONTRITION : HOW TO BE ATTAINED.

LENT.

PSALMS li. 17.

“ The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit ; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”

IN these words of the Psalmist a most blessed truth, and full of all consolation, is declared to the children of men ; namely, that, undeserving as we all are of God’s favour, yet is there one thing which, if He find in us, He will not despise, and that is a broken and contrite heart : if this be found truly in us, God will not despise us ; if this be found not in us, then will God despise whatever else there is in us.

Now this truth is worthy of our serious consideration. It is evident from these words of the Psalmist, as well as from many other parts of holy Scripture, that our eternal bliss or eternal torment depends upon the state of our hearts. If the heart be not right, it is impossible for a person to be

saved. Remembering, then, how much depends upon the condition of our hearts, how careful ought we to be in seeking every means to bring them into a right state ! For suppose we should any of us die not having our hearts in that right state ; then, so surely as now we live and breathe, so surely should we perish for all eternity. Bear in mind those words in the book of the Proverbs : “Keep thine heart with all diligence ; for out of it are the issues of life.”¹ Again, in the first book of Samuel : “The Lord seeth not as man seeth ; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”² And again, those words of our Saviour Himself, directing our chief attention to the heart : “Out of the heart,” He says, “proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false-witnesses, blasphemies : these are the things which defile a man.”³

I repeat, then, that, whatever be our outward life, our eternal condition depends upon the state of our inward hearts. To what purpose is it that a person should outwardly live a respectable life, if inwardly his heart is gone astray from God ? Of what use are outward observances to him who within has a heart hardened against his Maker, and unholy ? If in our hearts we love the world beyond any thing else, if in our hearts we cherish impure feelings, if in our hearts we have no true charity, nor faith, nor repentance—then every good

¹ Prov. iv. 23.

² 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

³ Matt. xv. 19.

action we do is vain ; rather, then it is impossible for us to do any good action at all ; for whatever mankind, who see not our hearts, may think of us, God, who sees them, will condemn us, notwithstanding all our fine words or deeds.

Now for such as feel the need of repentance there is a particular state, into which if, by the help of God, they can bring their hearts, all will be well ; and that state is described in the words of our text : “ A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.” If our hearts can be brought into this condition, then all will turn out well with us. So long as the heart is hard, it is impossible for it to be properly worked upon. Even the ground when it is hard can be made nothing of ; but once let it be broken up, and there is hope of a plentiful harvest. Such also is the heart of man : it must become broken before any thing can be hoped for it. But when broken and contrite, then God will not despise it ; then God will bless that broken and contrite heart, and, through His own ordinances, will restore it and revive it, and in time will make it as the garden of Eden, refreshing it with His abundant grace, and filling it with all that is needful for it.

This, then, we may be assured, should be our continual aim, namely, to bring our hearts into a broken and contrite state. And we should not deceive ourselves in this matter, thinking that at any time we shall be able to do this ; thinking

that, no doubt, some time or other before we die, or at least on our death-bed, we shall be able to obtain such a heart; or thinking that a broken and contrite heart is a common and easy state to attain to. For, indeed, to arrive at the possession of such a heart requires time, and earnestness, and knowledge also,—knowledge of ourselves, knowledge of our sins, knowledge of Christ. And it is not every one that has such a heart; and those who have it, feel most how imperfectly they have it, and desire to have it more perfectly.

Let us now consider some of those means which God has provided for us, by which we may attain to such a temper as has been described.

And, first, what is it to have a broken and contrite heart? To have such a heart is to have a sense of our own sinfulness and unworthiness in God's sight; not only to say so with the lips, but really to feel so: to grieve deeply and sharply for the sins which, from time to time, we have most grievously committed; to have forsaken all such sins; instead of being proud of ourselves, to condemn ourselves; instead of counting ourselves better than others, to acknowledge ourselves worse than all others; to value nothing in comparison with God, whom we have offended; to look to His mercy alone, through Jesus Christ; to be willing to give up the world; not to look to the world for our consolations; to have revenge against ourselves; to deny ourselves; to be very earnest for our souls above all things;

and to be diligent in redeeming the time which we have mispent, by employing it in devotion to God, and charity to man, and all good works.

Now how is such a temper to be obtained? First, we must make up our minds really to be in earnest about our future state after death. In how many is even this wanting! How many come to church, and attend to the outward forms of religion, who yet will confess even to themselves that somehow they do not feel much interest as to what may befall them in another life; in truth, the very idea of another life seldom comes to their minds. First, then, we must, as reasonable beings, shake off this thoughtless way of looking upon things; and to this end we must teach ourselves to practise meditation. We must reflect; we must set apart a time for reflecting; we must force ourselves often to reflect upon the uncertainty of life, the absolute certainty that we must die, and may die soon; upon the fact that an eternity lies before us, whether of happiness or misery, according to our works, to which death opens the door. We must meditate upon Heaven and Hell; on the continual presence of God and His angels; on the certainty that an account is to be given of every word, thought, and action of our lives. With this view, we should contrive to be at times alone, that in solitude and silence we may think over what is past and what is to come.

Another subject of our meditation, especially

at this holy season, should be the Death and Passion of our Saviour Christ. We should try by all means—by reading the holy gospels, by frequent thought, by attendance at church—to feel deeply and acutely that once upon a time the Everlasting Son of the Father was crucified for ourselves. Many persons all their life long do not really enter into this great truth : it is to them but as a dream, and no more. We should try to find some good books, which might help us in thinking upon the sufferings which Christ underwent for our sakes ; and should greatly condemn ourselves because we feel so little for those sufferings.

Besides meditation, self-examination is a practice most necessary, with a view to obtaining a contrite heart. Many persons never look into themselves, never seriously consider in what state they are as regards their salvation. Now we were taught as children, that at our baptism we were put in a state of salvation ; and accordingly we were directed to pray unto God that we might continue in the same state unto our lives' end. The question, then, to each of us is, "Have we continued in that state? have we, by God's grace, kept ourselves so free from the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, that, on the whole, despite of many infirmities, we may still be said to be in a state of salvation? or, on the other hand, have we actually fallen from that state, by giving way to some one deadly habit of sin, such as im-

purity, drunkenness, swearing, covetousness, pride, passion, envy, and the like? And are we still in the habit of any such one deadly sin? If so, we are not in a state of salvation; if so, should we now die, we perish for ever. Again: supposing we have left off such habits, are we, by repentance and its works, endeavouring to regain our former state in God's favour? and is our repentance real, or do we deceive ourselves?"

Such a self-examination as this, fairly carried out, would certainly assist, by God's blessing, towards forming in us a broken and contrite heart.

Then also we should add to this, the humble confession of our sins to God. One by one, we should consider them over in their worst light, and bewail them before our "Father which seeth in secret;"¹ and we should deepen the sense of them in our minds, by considering that it was for these our own sins, known beforehand by God, that Christ suffered so bitter a death. This would tend to excite us to a deep humbling of ourselves before God; and if while we confessed to Him our sins which we know, we were also to pray Him, of His mercy, to open our minds, and disclose to us those which we are still ignorant of, such a habit would not fail of producing in us an increased sense of our unworthiness. There is another sort of confession, recommended by the Apostle St. James as of use under this head: "Confess your faults," he says,

¹ Matt. vi. 4.

“one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.”¹ It would be a great benefit to us, if we could find some pious and trustworthy friend, to whom we might be in the habit of acknowledging our sins : this would create in us a great shame of them.

We have now considered meditation, self-examination, prayer, and confession, as means of assisting us towards obtaining a contrite heart ; and since we may be certain that such a heart will never come to us of itself, let us be diligent in using these means ; and in proportion as we use them we shall find greater strength given us by God ; for as even the first beginning of good resolutions comes from the Holy Spirit, so the Holy Spirit will continue to assist none but those who endeavour to assist themselves. It will be found an unspeakable benefit to those who truly desire to amend their lives, and bring their hearts into a proper state, if they would prevail on themselves to give up more time to prayer than is the habit of most persons ; if they would seriously look over their morning and evening private devotions, and see whether some additions might not be made to them. Many persons advanced in years are in the habit of using the very same prayers which they said when little children. Surely this shews an exceeding want of earnestness ; surely, as a grown-up person has many wants, and temptations, and

¹ James v. 16.

duties which a child has not, so also he requires longer and more thoughtful prayers for his daily use. We may be sure that an improvement in the habit of private prayer will certainly be followed by an improvement in other respects ; and it would be well, too, if we could arrange to set apart some time in the middle of the day—the hour of our Lord’s crucifixion—for the same purpose. God would assuredly bless us in a particular manner if we did so ; and it would lead, by degrees, to a great alteration in our hearts and in our lives.

Let us be persuaded that we cannot take too great pains to obtain a repentant heart ; let us be assured that a mere sudden repentance, which lasts a few days and then goes off, leaving the sinner where he was, is not the sort of repentance which will obtain for us, through Christ, the forgiveness of our sins. Repentance, to be true, must never cease in us, but continue to the end of life. There never must come a time in our lives when we may think we can leave off practising it : on the contrary, since every sin, even the smallest, is an act against God, and the breaking of His holy law ; since most of us in the course of our lives have not only committed merely small sins, or sins of infirmity, but have also committed great sins, and since the greater the sin the greater the punishment,—in proportion, therefore, as we have sinned, so must we repent ; and since “in many things we

every one of us offend,"¹ never must our repentance cease till we die. And this we shall certainly find, namely, that if, by God's grace, we are brought to a better understanding of His infinite greatness, and holiness, and love, and perfection, then, in the same proportion as we grow in the knowledge of God, we shall grow in the condemnation of ourselves and sorrow for having ever offended Him.

Considering, therefore, the exceeding importance of repentance to every one of us ; considering that for this cause Christ died and rose again, that He might bring in the grace of repentance, and that through Him our repentance might be able to obtain for us the forgiveness of our sins ; considering that if Christ had not died for us, all the repentance in the world could have done us no good, but that now, since He has died, it will, if true and sincere, most certainly avail towards our eternal justification,—is it possible that we can be too earnest in seeking of God this precious gift? And what a blessed thing it is that, by God's mercy, we are still alive, and able to set about this great work ! Whereas God might justly have cut us off long since, had He pleased ; only " He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."²

And this reminds me of another means which the Church sets before us, at this season of Lent, for increasing and confirming in us a broken and

¹ James iii. 2.

² 2 Peter iii. 9.

contrite heart ; namely, fasting or abstinence. Thus, in the Collect for the first Sunday in Lent, we say, “ O Lord, who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights ; give us grace to use such abstinence, that our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey Thy godly motions in righteousness and true holiness.” Here, you see, we pray of God to give us grace to use abstinence. Now what does abstinence mean ? It means, the not indulging ourselves in what we eat or drink, or in any other worldly enjoyments or amusements. How many of our sins arise, if we come to consider, from allowing ourselves in too much self-indulgence, and from not sufficiently taking up our cross and denying ourselves ! Let us remember, that no person can be living as a Christian unless he is living in the practice of self-denial. Now to fast is to deny ourselves, to forbear from eating or drinking delicacies, not to fare sumptuously, but to content ourselves with just what is necessary, and no more ; considering ourselves unworthy of enjoyments, sinners as we are, and condemning ourselves, that we may not be condemned of the Lord. This was the practice of St. Paul, who was “ in fastings often,”¹ and who thereby kept under his body, lest he should become a castaway.² This also our Saviour Himself has commanded : “ When the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then shall they fast in those days.”³

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 27.² 1 Cor. ix. 27.³ Mark ii. 20.

These, then, are some of the means which, under God, are open to us all, towards bringing ourselves into a humble and contrite state of heart: prayer, confession, Self-examination, meditation, and fasting; to which we may add, almsgiving. Those who practise these several duties may be certain that, if they persevere, a time will come when, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit assisting their endeavours, there will grow up in them that sort of heart, that kind of disposition, which God will not reject. Only let them bear in mind, that nothing which man can do is valuable simply in itself: in Christ alone is any thing that we do acceptable. For His sake who dwelleth in us, our poor and miserable endeavours towards improving ourselves will not be rejected, if only we are sincere and in earnest. God will bless them; God will give us more and more abundantly of His Spirit, that we may the more acceptably perform them. The blood of Christ will cleanse us day by day; and in the end we shall find those things to be easy which now seem impossible: we shall be able to offer unto God, poor as it is, the best thing that man can offer—the sacrifice of a troubled spirit; and our broken and contrite heart He will not despise.

SERMON XX.

SPIRITUAL DREAMING.

PSALM cxxvi. 1.

“ When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, then were we like unto them that dream.”

ON the occurrence of any important event in life, we frequently hear persons observe how like a dream it seems. A man has suddenly a large fortune left him. This produces a fluctuation in his mind ; and if you ask him what his feelings are, he will tell you that, do what he will, he cannot just at first divest himself of the feeling that the whole is a dream. A man changes his habitation for a distant neighbourhood. It appears at first a dream that he should be there at all ; and in a little while a dream that he should ever have been any where else. Or he alters the whole system of his business and occupation. What is the consequence ? It feels at first like a dream. Or, lastly, some beloved friend dies unexpectedly ; he views the body ; he attends the funeral ; he beholds the coffin, con-

taining perhaps the very wife of his bosom, descend into that dark house whence there is no return. He comes back ; he sits down solitary, and in tears ; he knows too well the reality of what has occurred : yet what is his feeling?—that it is all a dream. The hearse, the coffin, the grave, float before his eyes in a sort of mist, as a dream of a night-vision. And what he knows to be a very reality, that very fact he cannot realise.

Such is the miserable weakness of this human nature which we inherit from Adam. So darkened is it by imperfections, the consequence of original corruption and sin. Our minds, like a pool of water, are easily ruffled by the breath of a changed circumstance ; and it seems a law of our nature that they must take time to subside into their former position, before they lose those unsettled feelings which have been awakened, and regain the transparency of quiet and still waters, so as to reflect surrounding objects in their mirror as they really exist.

Nor is this feeling peculiar to our own times, however much these are the days of excitement. For the Psalmist who, in the 126th Psalm, celebrates the return from the captivity, describes exactly the same feeling as occurring to himself and his friends on that joyful occasion. “When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, then,” he says, “were we like unto them that dream.”

From the word “we” it appears that the

Psalmist himself was one of those who had belonged to the captivity, and had partaken in the restoration of Judah. Whether he had lived through all that dreary time, and had now returned as a man of grey hairs to the land of his fathers, or whether he had been born during the interval, we are not informed. In either case, as a child of Abraham, and attached to his native country, the glorious land of so many promises, the long years of captivity at Babylon must have been to him a time of bitter sorrow. Doubtless, if an old man, he was one of those who had "sat down and wept by the waters of Babylon, when he remembered thee, O Zion."¹ Then his harp hung on the trees that grew thereby, tuneless and unsounded, except by the breeze that floated past. Then he was unable, for very grief, to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. Especially as an "Israelite indeed" would he lament when he considered what was the cause of this long exile; namely, the deep sins of his country. And doubtless he would often be taking up that divine song of Moses, written prophetically concerning those very times. There he would read: "Of the Rock that begat thee, thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee: and when the Lord saw it, He abhorred them, and said, I will hide My face from them."² He would remember how Moses had denounced to his forefathers that, "If they kept not the commandments of their God, and

¹ Ps. cxxxvii. 1.

² Deut. xxxii. 18.

followed strange gods, the Lord would root them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land."¹ All this had been prophesied a thousand years since, and now it was fulfilled. It had come at last, slowly but certainly, first on Israel, by the hand of the King of Assyria, and now on Judah by the hand of the King of Babylon.

“O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance, Thy holy temple have they defiled, and made Jerusalem an heap of stones.” “Oh, let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before Thee!”² Thus would he exclaim in the language of the seventy-ninth Psalm. And had he now no consolation left? Had God clean forgotten His inheritance? By no means. He turns to the prophecies of Moses, and what does he read on this head? “It shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, and thou shalt return unto the Lord thy God, then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee.”³ He turns to Isaiah: “Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, I have raised him up in righteousness, and will direct all his ways. He shall build my city, and shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts.”⁴ He turns to Jeremiah: “Thus saith the Lord, After seventy

¹ Deut. xxix. 28.

² Ps. lxxix. 1, 12.

³ Ibid. xxx. 3.

⁴ Is. xlv. 1.

years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you and perform my good word towards you, in causing you to return to this place.”¹

He knows that these prophecies must be fulfilled, that they cannot err, as coming from the Holy Ghost. He therefore waits in faith the appointed time.

That time comes at last, the burden of a hundred prophecies. It comes as the Lord had said. The Psalmist departs for the land which faith had so often pictured to him—the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His harp no longer hangs sad and silent by the waters of Babylon. But in the words of the 85th Psalm he sings forth, and, doubtless, many a fellow-traveller joins with him in the song: “Lord, Thou art become gracious unto Thy land: Thou hast turned away the captivity of Jacob. Thou hast forgiven the offence of Thy people, and covered all their sins. Shew us Thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us Thy salvation.”²

And now we might go on to shew how Jerusalem was again restored, how “its street was built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.”³ Especially how, first of all, and before aught else was thought of, the temple rose up again; not, indeed, in its pristine outward glory, but destined to be more glorious still hereafter, through the presence within it of the Holy One of Israel.

All these points we might dwell upon, but I

¹ Jer. xxix. 10.

² Ps. lxxxv. 1.

³ Dan. ix. 25.

would rather call your attention again to our text. It seems, then, that although the Psalmist had been in faith waiting for the time of his deliverance from captivity, still, when that time came, his mind, and the minds of his companions, required time before they could settle down from the excitement which had been produced by so great an event in their lives. Things still appeared to them scarce like a reality. They could hardly be persuaded of their truth. They had that feeling very strong of which we have been speaking before as common to men in any great change of their lives. It was true they were in the land of their fathers; they pressed it with their own feet; they saw Mount Zion itself; and in Jerusalem, though in ruins, beheld beyond mistake their own Jerusalem. Yet, for all that, the whole seemed to them rather like a vision of the night than a reality; things seemed to come and go, and pass and repass, all in a maze. And afterwards, in looking back upon that period, they described these feelings thus, in the words of our text: "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, then were we like unto them that dream."

This statement of the Psalmist concerning his own feelings very forcibly reminds us of the state in which persons find themselves who, after living for a long time careless of religion, and in captivity to their sins, are at last, by the free grace of God, brought to think seriously on their condition, and

restored, so to say, for a while, into a better land. Like the man who, on having his sight partially revived, beheld men as trees walking, so do such persons find themselves to be in a sort of maze. They do not see things clearly, owing to the mists of their former corruptions. As the Psalmist returned to the ruins of Jerusalem, so do they return back, as it were, into their former selves, and find little left but ruins and desolations.

True, the grace of God is all-powerful. Still, what caution is needed on their own part! How earnest in prayer, how watchful over the deceitfulness of their hearts, must they be; "with what fear, with what trembling, must they work out their salvation,"¹ "building themselves up in their most holy faith,"² carrying their weapons at all times, contending with enemies without and traitors within, before, out of the ruins of former desolations, they can be restored into an habitation of the new Jerusalem!

Then, again, they think on the great change in their views of religion, of heaven, of immortality, which has come upon them. They feel themselves to be in a new condition towards God and towards man. Although their convictions are strong, they have perhaps little knowledge of the true faith. They are astounded at their former negligence and sinfulness. They look back upon the spiritual Babylon of their sins from which they have hardly

¹ Phil. ii. 12.

² Jude 20.

escaped, and forward towards the Jerusalem that is to be, and upward to the heavenly Zion, and they feel that there is evidently a great change in them. They hope that they may have power granted them from above to proceed as they have begun. They find the flesh drawing them back, and the Spirit drawing them forward. They feel that "the spirit is willing, but the flesh weak."¹

And all these thoughts together, connected with the vast alteration that has really taken place in them, inevitably produce in their minds a great excitement. They are in a manner beside themselves. The infinite mercy of God, opening to them the prospect of the entire forgiveness of all their sins, strikes them with astonishment. The reflection occurs again and again, Whether they possess that true and lively faith which is needed,—whether they do indeed truly repent with their whole heart, or are only deceiving themselves with a false repentance.

And the excitement thus produced does not pass away at once; it continues perhaps for a considerable time, and during all that time they seem to be, in a manner, scarce awake to the awful realities of invisible things, and might well cry out with the Psalmist, "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, then were we like unto them that dream."

Now, here it is very important for such persons

¹ Matt. xxvi. 41.

to understand, that mere feelings by themselves, apart from any thing else, do not constitute religion; and that, however hopeful their condition may be, it is not for a moment to be compared with the state of those who have been for a long time pursuing an earnest, sober, practical, patient, religious life. Grant that they are really returned from the captivity of spiritual Babylon: is there not Jerusalem yet to be rebuilt, and the wall, even in troublous times? Are there not many ruins of former corruptions to be removed out of the way? Is it reasonable for them to exclaim with the Psalmist, "Lord, Thou hast turned away the captivity of Jacob?" And shall they not add, with him also, "Wilt Thou not turn again and quicken us? Shew us Thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us Thy salvation."

Here it is that men fail. They too often content themselves with this excitement, with this dreamy feeling. It pleases them, it keeps them in a sort of rapture. They are glad to be like unto them that dream. They think that enough. So they sit down amid the havoc of former desolations of sin, and there, instead of steadily and laboriously working out their salvation, they scarce even endeavour to remove the filthy rubbish of former impurities, but are content to dream on and on, pleased and excited, and listening to the voice of Revelation as though it were no more than the

pleasant sound of singing birds, “or a very lovely song.”¹

Are there any present whose minds are more or less in the condition which I have been describing? “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”² It is well, it is hopeful, that your views of religion have changed, have become more serious. It is well, it is a happy, a blessed, a merciful thing for you that, by the grace of God, you begin to see the absolute necessity of serving sin less, and serving God more; that you see the great need of holiness in all those who would be one with Christ as Christ is one with God. Shall I say, it is well also you feel excited by the consideration of your Saviour, you who formerly were affected by no such thought? Shall I say, it is even well that you possess this dreamy feeling of your altered condition, you who, before this, did not even dream of Christianity?

But is this enough? No, believe me it is not. Bear with me, whilst I urge upon you the consideration, that if your present condition is to end ultimately in that sober, earnest, settled state, of which faith is the life, and which alone can be accepted through Christ in the last day,—if you really and truly desire this happy termination, you must seek it, not in indulging the dream as a dream, nor in cherishing the excitement as an excitement, but

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 32.

² Ephes. v. 14.

by entering immediately and at once upon some definite duties of obedience.

It is in the nature of excitements to grow feeble by repetition, and of dreams to break up and disperse. Beware that this be not your own case. Remember that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."¹ At present you are filled with rapture and wonder at the thought of God's infinite love and forgiveness, in freely receiving, for Christ's sake, all repentant sinners to the arms of His mercy. If this be the case, if the thought excites you, if your mind dwells upon it, then, in the name of that infinite love and forgiveness, I urge upon you to put these thoughts at once into action, and bring them to bear on the ordinary duties of your situation in life. Otherwise they will end in nothing.

Commence at once. Learn to be temperate, to be gentle, to be charitable, to be self-denying. Humble yourself before those who despise you. Submit to your superiors with a willing mind. Be strictly honest and honourable in your dealings. Assist those who have injured you; be even earnest in assisting them. Make an abundant restitution to all whom you have yourself injured in any way. Open your hand liberally to supply the necessities of others. Visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction. Keep yourself unspotted from the world.² Be diligent in your prayers. Be earn-

¹ Jer. xvii. 9.

² James i. 27.

est, if you have a household, in commencing at once family worship, morning and evening. Speak truth with your neighbour, in the smallest trifle. Govern the words of your lips and the thoughts of your heart. Throw up your idle companies, your vain amusements, your needless extravagances. Attend with regularity the services of the Church. Keep holy the Sundays, and Festivals, and Fast-days.

Oh, if men would but do these things, which God has commanded, instead of following ways of their own invention; if, instead of dreaming away their religious feelings, they would condescend to humble themselves to the sober and diligent discharge of every particular duty towards God and man, how many relapses in religion would be avoided, how much less cause would unbelievers have to mock at the power of Christianity! How many, who now live and die in a dream of religion, would grow up settled, grounded, established in the faith of their Saviour! True, the excitement would be destroyed; the dream would be annihilated: but in its place they would possess what is infinitely better; what, I trust, some here have possessed for many years,—confirmed habits, fixed principles, an unchangeable hope, an imperishable foundation.

The mist of dreamy feelings and excitements, which possessed them on first commencing a religious life, would clear off as they continued in its practice, would gradually fade away into less and

less ; and at last, parting asunder like a veil rent in twain, would disclose the eternal sanctuary of the Most High God, and Christ our High Priest the Mediator of the new covenant, and the golden altar of incense, and the innumerable companies of Angels, and the invisible armies of Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs, and the choirs of white-robed Saints, and the everlasting mansions of the redeemed.

SERMON XXI.

THE WAVERING CHRISTIAN.

JAMES i. 6.

“ But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.”

It appears from these words, that even in the times of the Apostles there were persons who, although they did not omit praying, prayed nevertheless to no purpose. Their prayers were not heard; or rather, were heard and rejected. They obtained nothing from the Lord, although they prayed to Him: and doubtless thence arose, even in those days, many cavillings against the Christian profession; many relapses into sin, through a despair of God's aid; and many false estimates of the true nature and object of prayer.

Numbers in our own times are, it is to be feared, daily led into similar errors, from observing in their own cases the apparent neglect with which their

prayers are received by the Almighty. Let us, then, hearken to the Apostle St. James, pointing out to us one principal cause why the prayers of so many are sent up in vain, and produce, to all appearance, no benefit.

The cause of this, he informs us, lies in the habit, common to many, of wavering in their religious course; a habit so pernicious in its consequences, that it checks the very ascent of prayer on its way to heaven, and taints that incense which, when rightly hallowed by earnest faith, is well pleasing to God, through the merits of the great Intercessor. "Let him ask in faith," says the Apostle, "nothing wavering." And then, to strengthen the point which he desires particularly to enforce, namely, that wavering in religion is the great cause why so many prayers are rejected, he adds a comparison at once clear and forcible, shewing in its true light the character of a wavering Christian. "He that wavereth," he says, "is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

This inspired comparison will remind you of some other parts of Scripture, in which the same thought is contained. Thus, of the wicked, Isaiah says that they are "like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."¹

¹ Is. lvii. 20.

St. Jude, again, describes some of his own day as “raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame;”¹ and Jacob, on his deathbed, at once foretells the fate and describes the character of Reuben in these words, “unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.”²

Now, in considering the comparison of the Apostle, we find three points of view in which a wavering Christian resembles a wave of the sea. First, a wave is driven with the wind; driven, that is to say, by every wind that blows: so also is the wavering Christian. Secondly, a wave of the sea is tossed, as the Apostle expresses it; that is to say, restless, disturbed, and disquieted: so also is the wavering Christian. Thirdly, a wave of the sea spends itself in vain: so also does the wavering Christian:—such a man “must not expect to receive any thing of the Lord.” Let us consider these three points in their order.

And, first, a wave of the sea is driven at the mercy of every wind that blows. Here paint to your minds what many of you have doubtless often witnessed—I mean, the face of the great deep. Imagine to yourselves the winds of heaven struggling for the mastery upon it. At one time the north wind has its full sway, at another the south, at another the east, at another the west. Before each the waves bend obediently, turning their course in the direction of the gale. As one wind

¹ Jude 13.

² Gen. xlix. 4.

dies away, and another rises from an opposite quarter, so do the long furrows of the waves correspondingly alter their course. Each billow yields to the force of every new breeze that blows, having no direction of its own. Alternately it changes from one point to another, with every succeeding blast. And so it is for ever. Wind after wind springs up on the surface of the deep; wave after wave courses onward, the sport of every storm that beats from every quarter under heaven.

Now, how true is the Apostle in comparing this to the state of a wavering Christian, who, no more than the waves, has a fixed course of his own; but is blown about by every breath of doctrine, by every imagination that enters his heart, by every object that strikes his senses! Sometimes believing one thing, sometimes believing another thing; sometimes holding very strongly to one opinion, sometimes to another quite opposite; sometimes obstinate in adhering to a view which he has formed in his own mind; and then of a sudden, at the mere chance-suggestion of another person, giving up his former view for a new one: his mind shifting like a weathercock towards every fresh object that presents itself; unresolved and fluctuating in his creed,—his notions, even of morality, unsteady, and based on no certain foundation; with no fixed religious habits: sometimes attending to his prayers for several days, sometimes omitting them for weeks together; sometimes reading his

Bible by large quantities at a sitting, sometimes altogether neglecting it for months; irregular in his religious observances; the sport of his feelings; and influenced in general by the last person with whom he conversed;—how well does such a character resemble a wave of the sea driven with the wind!

Far different he who has fixed principles by which to direct himself, who has received the truth in the love of it; and having so received it, swerves from it no more. Such a man, instead of being like a wave of the sea, rather resembles some gallant ship, steered steadily through storm and through tempest; and if obliged for a short time to pause by the greatness of the waves, not drifting along with the wind, but casting an anchor fixed and immovable, not in the shifting sand of human opinions, but in the unshaken Rock of Ages.

Now, secondly, observe the natural consequences of this wavering condition. And these consequences I conceive to be expressed by the Apostle in the word “tossed.” “Driven with the wind,” he says, “and tossed.” If you have ever observed the waves, you must have remarked this peculiarity with regard to them—namely, how very restless and disturbed a thing a wave is; ever rising and sinking, heaving and swelling, tossed and disquieted as though it had no peace. And this too is the case with the wavering Christian: he too has no peace. The very fact of his wavering produces a

disquietness and unhappiness in his mind, as a natural consequence of his unsettled condition. His thoughts are ill at ease. All that his wavering has done for him has been this, to make him miserable. While others, resting calm and quiet in the faith of their Saviour, duly discharging, in a Christian manner, the daily calls of their life, knowing that God cannot deceive, and with the temper of a child submitting to Him all the cavillings of their minds, — while these, and such as these, poor in spirit, humble in thought, obedient in conduct, have obtained that peace which the world cannot give, what has the wavering Christian been doing for himself all this while but heaping up sorrow, and trouble, and vexation of spirit? He will of himself confess to you that he is not at peace, that his habit of yielding to impressions from whatever quarter has dimmed his faith, and destroyed the integrity of his judgment.

We come now to the third point in which he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea — namely, that each is spent in vain, and dashed to pieces to no purpose.

Here let me call to your remembrance some such scene as the following, which you may have before now witnessed — a low sandy shore, indented here and there with rocks, on which the waves of the sea are continually dashing. By such a place you may have stood at times of your life, and musingly watched wave after wave rolling forwards in

endless succession. There was much noise ; there was much foam ; there was the appearance of great things : but how did all this end ? What resulted from so great a tumult ? Why, simply nothing. The waves which dashed on the rocks broke themselves in pieces, and there was an end of them. And those which rolled in upon the sand, little by little diminished away, leaving nothing behind but a narrow line of shrivelled foam.

And such also is the result of the uncertain, fluctuating advances which the wavering Christian makes in his course. All that he does is in vain. " Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."

Like the waves which spend themselves away on the beach, such has been the course of his years. Let him but look back upon his past life, and what will he behold but a countless succession of hopes, fears, troubles, anxieties, labours, all rushing on one after another like so many waves. There has been perhaps much noise, much show ; he may have made even a name in the world, or he may have amassed wealth, or he may have enjoyed pleasures beyond other men. But where is his true gain ? What one incorruptible, imperishable treasure has he secured ? He himself perceives, on looking back, that he has obtained nothing commensurate with the anxieties endured ; that wave after wave his life has hurried on, surging, swelling, heaving, rising, sinking, vexed, tossed, and disquieted, for

nothing else but to break itself over and over again in atoms and shivers upon the rocky strand of this world, or on its barren shore, leaving no result but a little spray.

Thus far we have followed out the comparison of St. James. It remains for me to address a few words to those whose conscience tells them that they are more or less in the condition of the wavering Christian here described.

Whoever, then, you are who now hear me, and stand convicted by your own conscience of an infinite waste of years, thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears, anxieties,—all of which, while wavering between this world and the next, you nevertheless have been content to spend deliberately on this world alone; you, whoever you are, who yet having been baptised, have been irrevocably called for once and for ever to the high profession, the lowly thoughts, the self-denying life, the painful cross, the glorious crown of the Christian faith,—consider, I beseech you, whither you are tending.

You complain that your prayers are not heard, that you receive nothing from God in answer to them.

Now, in the first place, it may be that, after all, God may be attending to your prayers more than you think, and may be reserving an answer to them in His own good time. But, in the second place, honestly ask yourself whether it is reasonable, considering the customary habits of your life, that your

prayers should be heard ; especially when on this point the Scriptures are so very plain in declaring that a wavering Christian shall not obtain any thing of the Lord. Remember, “ God is a spirit ; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”¹

God also is a jealous God. He cannot be pleased with the prayer of lukewarm indifference. The supplications which He expects of His creatures are very far removed from those of a wavering mind, such as is yours.

Suffer me to warn you of the danger in which you stand. For years you have been continuing a life of wavering obedience ; which is, in fact, but another term for simple disobedience. Be not deluded by the idea that fresh years as they come will of themselves necessarily alter your character in this respect. Believe me, there is but one way,—He that is to all “ the way, and the truth, and the life.”² To Him be earnest in confessing this particular habit of your life. Confess that you have wavered too long and too often even to hope that He will now give you power to turn from your dangerous course. Confess this again and again, beseeching of Him “ with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning,”³ imploring Him “ who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,”⁴ that of His infinite mercy He will not suffer you to go on thus changing and

¹ John iv. 24.

² John xiv. 6.

³ James i. 17.

⁴ Heb. xiii. 8.

wavering, but, through His own immutable, eternal Spirit, will pour into your heart the power to change no more.

Then, to prove to your Saviour that you really mean what you say (though even this He knows far better than yourself), hasten to commit yourself to some definite acts of obedience. Give up some things in which you at present indulge yourself. Exert some self-denials. Enter upon practical duties. Are you wealthy?—increase your charities; and besides those which you discharge in public, do others in secret, which shall only be known to your God. Are you poor? You may still “visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keep yourself unspotted from the world.”¹ To these acts, and such as these, the lowly duties of a Christian, humbly commit yourself in faith. In them patiently continue. And He who knows all hearts, and sees that you really desire to alter your ways, doubt not but He will at last have mercy upon you, “stablish, strengthen, and settle you;”² that “henceforth you be no more a child tossed to and fro,” but “in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”³

¹ James i. 27.

² 1 Peter v. 10.

³ Ephes. iv. 14.

SERMON XXII.

CHRIST'S YOKE THE CHRISTIAN'S REST.

MATTHEW xi. 28.

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

IN these words our Saviour gives from His own lips a most merciful invitation to the children of men. “Come unto Me,” He says, “all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “Come unto Me.” Observe, my brethren, that expression; for it is the same which we also find in the Old Testament, addressed by Christ to the Israelites, at a time when, not yet having become flesh, He spake unto them by His Spirit in the prophets. Thus in Isaiah we read: “Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together. Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.”¹

¹ Is. xlv. 20, 22.

Again : “ Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread ? and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? Incline your ear, and come unto Me : hear, and your soul shall live.”¹

Thus it was that, even before His Incarnation, the Eternal Word, the Everlasting Son of the Father, spake by His Spirit ; and now, having come forth from the Father, and having come into the world, He again, with His own lips, entreateth us, saying, “ Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

“ All ye that labour and are heavy laden.” How many sorts of persons are here understood ! How many thousands throughout the world, in one way or another, labour and are heavy laden ! This was the case with the heathens of old, this was the case with the Jews in our Saviour’s days, this is the case with many in these Christian times. The heathens laboured and were heavy laden under divers idolatries and foul superstitions, under ignorance concerning the nature of God and of themselves, under the weight of many deadly vices, “ through fear of death all their lifetime subject to bondage.”² The Jews, with a clearer revelation than was the lot of the heathens,—a religion which, to those who had sufficient faith, spoke plainly of an Atonement to come,—lay nevertheless under the bondage of the law, looking rather to its

¹ Is. lv. 1.

² Heb. ii. 15.

letter which killed, than to its spirit which gave life,¹ and seeking righteousness, not by faith, but by the deeds of the law, by which no flesh could be justified: "for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone."² Then also, in addition to the letter of the law, they had suffered themselves to be laden by the Pharisees with divers traditions of men; "heavy burdens," as our Saviour Himself says, "and grievous to be borne;"³ and which could not deliver them from sin. And now, again, in these days many labour and are heavy laden, even among Christians! How many are there who, in their baptism, were made members of Christ, yet as they grew up, instead of keeping themselves pure, by the aid of the Holy Ghost given unto them, as they might have done, have fallen into divers wicked lusts and deadly habits, which have again brought them into bondage to Satan, and have laid heavy burdens upon them! And how many, while thus heavy laden, labour indeed, but only for this world; and being overwhelmed with covetous desires and inordinate love of riches, are neither able nor willing to follow Jesus Christ! Others, again, there are, who labour and are heavy laden in a different way, who are grieved and groan at thinking over the variety and greatness of their sins; yet, through ignorance of the true faith, never come to their Redeemer for His Absolution in the way in which He would have them come, and so continue

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 6.² Rom. ix. 32.³ Matt. xxiii. 4.

burdened all their days. Others are wearied and labour under the troubles of life : under bodily pain, sickness, lowness of spirits, afflictions, or the loss of relations, things which, as they declare, make life itself a burden to them ; and numbers every year do, in fact, on this account put an end to their lives, thinking, foolishly, to escape their burden in that way, whereas they only change it for one far heavier and more lasting.

Now, to all persons whatever, who in any manner labour and are heavy laden, there is no way but one of throwing off this burden ; and that is to be found in Him “ who is the way, and the truth, and the life.”¹

“ Come unto Me,” says our blessed Saviour, “ all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Harken unto this, as though your Saviour Himself was speaking to you ; and as He died for yourself in particular, and in your baptism has vouchsafed unto you admission into all the privileges of His incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection ; so be you also persuaded, beyond all doubt, that whatever kind of burden you have on your soul, it may be removed by rightly coming to Christ, who is both able and willing to ease you of it. Happy indeed if you but feel your burden so only as to seek Christ for the removal of it ; for too many are quite ignorant of their own wretchedness, and seeming to themselves to have

¹ John xiv. 6.

no burden, never seek Christ at all : and so die in their sins. And other miserable ones there are, who, even feeling the burden of their sins, nevertheless do not seek Him who alone can remove it, but fly to the world and its excitements, in the vain hope of finding that peace which it cannot give.

But it will be said, How are we to come unto Christ? That Christ is now ascended into heaven ; that while He was in the world, when He was seen with the eyes, when He was looked upon, when He, the Word of life, was handled by the Apostles with their hands,—then, indeed, it was possible to come unto Him ; but now He is far away—He has left the world, and is gone back to the Father. How, then, are we to come unto Him? We cannot now go and fall at His sacred feet, nor touch the hem of His garment, nor sit at meat with Him, nor eat and drink with Him, nor question Him and receive His reply ; for He is gone into a far country, and will not return till the end of the world.

To this I answer, Consider, after all, that although Christ is gone into heaven, He nevertheless is “not far from every one of us.”¹ Even while He was on earth, He, the Son of Man, was in heaven, according to His mighty power as Son of God ; much more, then, at this present time, although in His divine body He sitteth at the right hand of God, yet as having “all power given unto Him in

¹ Acts xvii. 27.

heaven and in earth,"¹ is He marvellously present throughout the world, observing every one of us, yea, dwelling within us, according to His mysterious nature, if so be we abide in Him.

We must, then, regard it as a certain fact, that although we cannot now with our eyes behold Christ, yet is He really in a wonderful manner amongst us, even more entirely than in the days of His flesh; and that at any moment, to any person, He could shew Himself if He willed. But He would have us live by faith, and not by sight. And it is but a little thing to us to have lost the power of beholding Him with our carnal eyes, if only in the faith of our souls we acknowledge His invisible presence, and purify our hearts here, according to His commandment, that hereafter we "may see Him as He is."²

How, then, are we to come unto Christ? We are to come unto Him by considering that, although unseen, He is continually present; by, therefore, often lifting up our hearts to Him, feeling certain that He knows our every thought. We are to come to Christ by praying to Him as often in the day as we can find time; knowing that in some wonderful way He is close by, and hears our prayers, and can fulfil them to us. We are to come to Christ by the constant habit of reading the holy Gospels, and meditating upon His life, His wonderful deeds, His words, His sufferings, His

¹ Matt. xxviii. 18.

² 1 John iii. 2.

blessed example, His crucifixion, resurrection, and glorious ascension. We are to come to Christ by obeying His holy laws, and walking in His steps, in the denial of ourselves, and the taking up of our cross. We are to come to Christ by frequenting those holy places of worship in which He more especially manifests Himself, and there, in the ordinances of His Church, worshipping and glorifying Him.

Christ Himself, indeed, shews us, in the text, one especial way in which He would have us come unto Him. "Take My yoke upon you," He says, "and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Rest is that which all mankind more or less desire and seek after; and as the rest of the body is a great good, so the rest of the soul is the greatest of all goods; and such a state is in the gift of our Saviour. But on whom does He bestow it? On such as take His yoke upon them; for He Himself says, "Take My yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest for your souls." We may therefore be persuaded, that unless, and until, we take His yoke upon us, we shall never find true rest. And this is the reason why the souls of so many Christians are restless and disquieted; namely, because they do not strive sincerely to take upon them the yoke of Christ. A yoke implies entire submission: a yoke is that which man puts upon inferior animals to make them do him service. To take the yoke of

Christ, then, is to hold oneself under submission to Christ ; to suffer oneself to be constrained by the love of Christ ; to count oneself as belonging to Christ ; to do service to Christ ; to consider oneself as not one's own, but His. Now most persons, on the other hand, look upon themselves as their own, and able to do as they please. But Christ would have us not do our own will, but His will, even as He Himself did not His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him. And to such as take His yoke, and do His will, He promises rest. They shall no longer labour and be heavy laden with either inward or outward burdens, but shall enjoy an enduring repose in Him.

Neither must we pass over those other words of our divine Saviour, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." Here you see the beginning of all true peace, and the only way of finding it; namely, humility. A proud disposition can never be at rest. Pride is in itself a restless thing; but humility is ever at peace with itself and with the world. This was the mind of Christ, and what He would have in us: a meek and lowly heart. This alone it is which truly exalts the Christian; for "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."¹ "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."² "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth."³ This, then, is the temper at which we should aim if we ever

¹ Matt. xxiii. 12.

² James iv. 6.

³ Matt. v. 5.

desire to enter into peace. Only consider, if you could but once become a meek and lowly person, from how many evils it would save you! how many wicked tempers of mind, how many evil thoughts would by that means be removed! how free would you be from the tyranny of passion! how un murmuring in every affliction, knowing that you deserved far worse! how grateful even for the least blessing!

And thus you would find the truth of what our Saviour says: "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." What encouraging words are these! Let a man only put himself under the yoke of Christ, that is, put himself in that course of religious self-denial which is meant by bearing the cross, and if he perseveres, what was difficult will be found easy. This, too, would have been the case with ourselves if, from the days of our youth, we had loved Christ, and had not fallen away from Him. Then the yoke of Christ would have been found very easy, and His burden light indeed; He Himself declaring to us, "I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me."¹ It is because we have, more or less, indulged ourselves in different sorts of sins against our conscience; it is because, from our youth, we have accustomed ourselves to do evil, till evil has become pleasant to us; it is because we have loved the world when we were told not to love the world: these are the reasons why

¹ Prov. viii. 17.

now we find the yoke of Christ difficult to bear. Had we only sought Him early, then all things would now have been easy to us. But while we were neglecting God, Satan obtained power over us; and now, when we would return to Him, we find it hard; alas, how hard do many find it! How hard to overcome even one evil habit—so great power has it obtained over them! And many finding it so hard, despair of themselves, and fall into a slothful way of life, taking no pains, but suffering themselves to be carried on as they are, till it becomes, in truth, too late to amend.

Let it not be so with us, my brethren; let us, as we desire the eternal salvation of our souls, be deterred by no sort of difficulty from aiming at an increasing strictness with ourselves, a more real bearing of Christ's yoke. If we but truly draw near to God, He will draw near to us, and will meet us on the way.

At first regularity in religious duties may seem a burden, but after a while we shall love them for their own sake; and so far from proving a bondage, it will be found to be perfect freedom. Let us, then, be diligent in unlearning our own will, and in learning God's will. Christ will make all smooth to us. He will enable us to perform gladly those self-denials which He requires of us. Only let there be first a willing mind, and all things will seem light that bring us nearer to Him, in whom alone, either here or hereafter, our true rest is to be found.

SERMON XXIII.

DISAPPOINTMENTS IN LIFE.

Exodus xv. 23.

“And when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah ; for they were bitter. . . And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink ? And he cried unto the Lord ; and the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.”

It is needless for me to remind you of the causes which, under God's providence, moved the Israelites to quit Egypt. Suffice it to say, the predestined hour had now arrived ; and after the exhibition of wonderful miracles, Moses, in the face of the sovereign and armies of Egypt, had led forth God's chosen people, in search of the long-promised land, crowning their deliverance from bondage with the overthrow of their enemies in the Red Sea.

“The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil. . . . Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them : they sank as lead in the mighty waters : Who is like unto Thee, O Lord ?”¹ Such was the triumphant song of Moses,

¹ Exod. xv. 9-11.

as he now looked down upon the wide-scattered camp of the Israelites, lining the shore of that sea which, instinct with miraculous life, had just absorbed his enemies in one common grave. His countrymen were at last free from bondage; and although a desert lay before them full of unknown perils, although six hundred thousand men, with women and children, were to be led across that desert, over leagues of arid sand, what were these forebodings compared with the gift of deliverance?

As yet there was no ark, no tabernacle, no order of tribes, no discipline, so necessary in the movement of such a vast multitude. All this must have increased the difficulties of Moses. But, lo! overhead, far in the sky, is seen the miraculous cloud—a strange, awful, mysterious object, brightening up by night into a pillar of fire. That cloud is a proof to Moses that the Lord of hosts is by, and will not forsake His people.

Strong in faith, “as seeing Him who is invisible,”¹ he leads his countrymen into the wilderness. The cloud moves before; the Red Sea disappears behind; and a whole nation (a sight unparalleled in the annals of the world) advances into the heart of an inhospitable desert, where even at this day the cautious traveller can hardly even set foot with safety.

In this manner the Israelites had proceeded for three days, when it was discovered that there was

¹ Heb. xi. 27.

no water left. Those who have read accounts of modern travels in the East will readily conceive the apprehension and terror which such a discovery must have excited, not to add the pangs of thirst by which they were now attacked. Awful thought, to perish in the wilderness! a whole nation! Far from the land of their fathers!

Suddenly, as we may suppose, a cry is heard. Pools of water are seen in the distance. Their hopes rise. What does not the sight of those springs of water promise? How sweet will their taste be to the parched lip! They summon all their powers. They rush on. They reach the pools. They kneel down on the sand in their haste. They taste the water. Why do they start back? Alas! it is bitter; they cannot drink it. If they do, they but perish the sooner. There is no hope left for them: "What shall we drink? What shall we drink?" This was their cry in the words of the text. The cry swelled to a murmur, a murmur loud and deep, against Moses: "Why hast thou brought us to die in the wilderness?"

Then it was that Moses, by another miracle, at once brought peace and hope to the thousands of Israel, and proved his commission to be from no other than the most High God: "He cried unto the Lord, and the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet." The bitter waters were made sweet.

Oh, happy Israelites ! Their thirst is quenched. Their despair is past. Already in imagination they behold their promised land, and, far in the distance, the holy hill of Zion.

Such is a faint outline of what we may suppose to have occurred to the Israelites at Marah. Let us proceed to consider whether there is any application of the history to ourselves who live now.

And, first, we can have no doubt that the travels of the Israelites through the wilderness do indeed represent, in a certain shadowy and mysterious manner, the travels of Christ's pilgrim Church. This is expressly asserted by St. Paul : " Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea ; and were all baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea ; and did all eat the same spiritual meat ; and did all drink the same spiritual drink : for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them ; and that Rock was Christ. . . . Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples ; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."¹

There is, then, some secret similitude between the history of the Israelites in the wilderness and that of ourselves. For instance, the Israelites were delivered from bondage in Egypt by Moses ; we, by a greater than Moses, have been delivered

¹ 1 Cor. x. 1.

from a more than Egyptian bondage. The Israelites were baptised in the Red Sea, and came forth, so to say, a new people ; we, by a yet more miraculous baptism, have received spiritual regeneration. The Israelites passed through a wilderness to a promised land, the Land of Canaan ; we, too, through the spiritual wilderness of this world, are passing, fed, as we hope, by more than angel's food, to a land rich with better promises. The Israelites marched in full arms to destroy the enemies of God ; we, too, march forward with no earthly weapons, bearing the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world.

And is there not for us, as we pass each through his own wilderness, a Marah also ?

You anticipate the reply. Yes ; for every Christian, as he journeys onward, there is prepared some bitter spring, of which he must taste some day. Who will say that there may not be many such in store for all of us ? Some afflictions there are which nature itself inevitably prepares for every child of Adam ; but are there not also many other bitter springs which rise up to meet us when we least expect ? And granting that there is much of sickly sentimentalism in that melancholy tone into which our minds are sometimes unhappily betrayed, still, in human life as it is, is there not enough of actual disappointment, enough of evident afflictions,

vexations, and trials, rising up out of its never-ending vicissitudes — enough, I repeat, to make us acknowledge that the world affords its Marah to us, no less than did the wilderness to the Israelites?

It is true that in early youth, looking forward into life, we are at first very unwilling to allow this. We make up our minds that, if the world, as a whole, must be granted, in one point of view, to be a wilderness, still at least it shall be a pleasant wilderness to us. So gazing onward, like the Israelites before they came to Marah, we in our own imagination plant this wilderness, this desert, with joyous springs, agreeable to the eye, and sweet to the taste. We determine that from stage to stage we will proceed from one pleasant spring to another yet more pleasant. “To-morrow,” we cry, “shall be as this day, and much more abundant.”¹ We will not suffer, even in thought, that any one of these springs shall turn out bitter. Nor are we content with this. We convert each of these imaginary fountains into a very oasis: we cover its margin with soft grass; we crowd it round with pleasant scenes and companions, and think how soothing it will be to hang our harps upon the trees that grow thereby, and to lie down by those sweet waters, forgetful all the time that this life is a pilgrimage to the true follower of the Cross, and that it is not our business to be lying idly down, but to be earnestly and painfully marching forward to that heavenly Zion which

¹ Is. lvi. 12.

glimmers in the distance, and calls us on, over arid sands and after much toil, to seats of unutterable repose.

Such is the feeling with which the pilgrim of this world starts into the wilderness in early life; a feeling rich in anticipation of pleasant springs. And who will deny but that, by the bounty and goodness of God, he does meet with sweet wells of water here and there, which for a time may solace him? Who will deny that there are many connexions of human life, innocent in themselves,—sweet springs, of which even the Christian pilgrim may drink without shame?

But there is in the soul an instinctive thirst for the most perfect, the most excellent; and this thirst, however corrupted, will strengthen as a person detects the deceitfulness of many springs which he had reckoned upon when he began his pilgrimage. The pleasures which pleased him once, now, as he advances in life, please him no more. Many of those springs, which in the early days gushed out pure and fresh, are now dried up and exhausted. Already, when there are still some pleasant springs left, he begins to cry out that all is barren; and remembers the words of Jeremiah: “My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water.”¹

Still, notwithstanding temporary convictions of

¹ Jer. ii. 13.

the world's hollowness, notwithstanding occasional exclamations to that effect, there are few persons who, even in the middle of their years, after all the delusions which they have experienced in themselves and others, do not still retain in view some particular earthly object, which they think must make them happy at last. They look forward to some one point in their lives, to some one especial event, to the gratification of some one ardent hope, which, notwithstanding past disappointments, they feel certain must bring them felicity at last.

Well, years pass on ; and at last they approach this so-desired event, —the settlement of a child in life, the gaining of some long-expected fortune, the consummation of some long-cherished ambition. This event they approach at last. Already they see it in the distance, as the Israelites saw the distant waters of Marah ; a delicious spring, as it appears, in the world's wilderness, which by one sip is to satisfy all the thirsts and longings of a life. Already, like the thirsty Israelites in the desert, they begin picturing to themselves how sweet that spring will be. They solace themselves in the thought of resting there, as though it were the end of their toil ; they anticipate events in their eagerness ; they hasten forward, even at some sacrifice ; they reach the spring ; they stoop to taste. Why do they start back ? Alas, it is bitter :—it is bitter ! This event, so long desired, has come to pass ; but the circumstances of things are changed. Other

events have turned up, upon which they did not count, or it may be their own feelings have altered. This water, which was to have been so sweet, is bitter to their taste: more bitter than the bitter waters of Marah to the Israelites of old. Like them, they now begin to murmur, with yet less reason; and wearied out at last with complaints, cast themselves down, wretched and exhausted, by the barren side of that bitter spring, which, in the fondness of their earlier anticipations, they had margined with perpetual flowers, and imbued with a sweetness unknown to the fountains of this world.

And thus perhaps they will lie, day after day, by the side of this bitter spring, brooding over their disappointment. Thus many have lain in their affliction, not considering how far it is possible for this Marah to be made sweet; but rather, in their desperation, drinking of its bitterness till their very heart has become bitter to its core. This is often the secret of those embittered characters we meet in society, who cause pain when they appear, and are shunned where it is possible, because their very presence throws a check upon the gaiety of others' hearts.

But is it true that there is any way for changing these bitter waters of disappointment into sweetness? What angel will come down from heaven and restore this spring? What miracle will unlock for us the sweet waters? The Marah of the Israelites was changed into sweetness; but who shall

sweeten the Marah of human life, which has been bitter from the beginning? Who shall shew us a tree, as God did to Moses: "and when he had put the tree into the waters, they became sweet?" Is there, in fact, any such tree?

Yes, there is one such tree, the tree of life, which once grew in the garden of Eden; the tree from which the Cross was wrought, the tree on which Christ was crucified. We read, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree;"¹ and again, "Jesus, whom they slew, and hanged on a tree;"² and again, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."³ There is, then, such a tree as we need; and this tree is the Cross.

Whoever, then, thou art who, brooding over thine own Marah, makest bitterness doubly bitter, remember the Cross of thy Saviour. Cry unto the Lord, as Moses did; and He will shew thee a tree. Look to the Cross: look to thy Saviour on that Cross: look to the precious blood which, pouring from thence, brought redemption and peace to the world; depriving sorrow of its bitterness, death of its sting, the grave of its victory. Throw thyself, in faith and resignation, upon the tender mercies of Him that hung thereon. Mingle thine afflictions with His. Plant His Cross in thine own embittered heart; and, by His grace, this spring of disappointment shall become less and less bitter,

¹ Deut. xxi. 23.

² Acts x. 39.

³ Gal. iii. 13.

shall become instilled by degrees with sweeter and sweeter drops, till at last the whole bitterness shall have passed away, and nothing but sweetness shall remain.

The bitter water is become sweet. Oh, happy pilgrim of Christ! Happier far than the Israelites of old! To them it was but an earthly spring that became sweet. Their lives were prolonged a little while; yet, after all, they died in the wilderness, far away from the land of their fathers. To thee, in a spiritual desert, is sprung up a fountain of living water. To thee thy "light affliction," humbly borne in the faith of the Cross, "worketh a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."¹ What was but an earthly bitterness is changed into the everlasting sweetness of heaven; that water, so painful to thy taste before, is become to thee now a fountain of life, light, and immortality!

Henceforth, then, remember the waters of Marah. And as to those who have as yet tasted only the sweet waters of life, let them bear in mind that they also must meet with one or other of its bitter springs in their turn. All must be afflicted, all must be disappointed, sooner or later. These things are, in God's providence, the instruments of trying our faith. It is the eternal law of the Most High, that we "be perfected through suffering."

While we use life as not abusing it, while we

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

enjoy what God gives, while our hearts are merry, and our tongues joyful, and our spirits high, let us keep in mind the truth, that our merry hearts, and our joyful tongues, and our high spirits, cannot alter the irreversible sentence, "In the world ye shall have tribulation;"¹ and let the remembrance of this keep us humbled and subdued. Welcome afflictions, welcome disappointments, if only they bring us nearer to Him in whom is our true rest. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." The sadder the present sorrow, the more joyful the after happiness; the more bitter the outward earthly spring, the sweeter that inward spring which flows from heaven.

¹ John xvi. 33.

SERMON XXIV.

KNEELING AT PUBLIC PRAYER.

PSALM xcvi. 6.

“ Oh, come, let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker.”

THE Psalm from which our text is taken is appointed to be used at the beginning of morning prayer; and doubtless it was so chosen because it very forcibly expresses the feelings with which a religious mind draws near to God.

Indeed, this very Psalm used to be chanted by the Jews at the beginning of their temple-service, and was for ages used in the Christian Church at the commencement of morning prayer, as we see from the ancient liturgies; on which account it was called the Invitatory Psalm. It begins, “ Oh, come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation;” and then, because it is necessary at all times, when we come before God, to appear with a thankful heart, it goes on to say, “ Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and shew ourselves glad in Him

with psalms." Afterwards it gives the reason for this: "For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In His hand are all the corners of the earth: and the strength of the hills is His also. The sea is His, and He made it: and His hands prepared the dry land." Then, next upon this thought of the greatness and majesty of God, the Creator of the world, and of all things that are therein, what follows? There follows the necessity of worshipping this great and glorious God: "Oh, come, let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker." And why so? Because He is the Lord "our" God. Not only is He God of the universe, but also especially "our" God: "He is the Lord our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand." We, as Christians (for the Psalms were written by inspiration, not for Jews only, but for Christians also, through all time)—we, as Christians, are "the people of His pasture." He has called us, and set us apart in a particular manner, to worship Him. We are also "the sheep of His hand." He has redeemed us by the blood of His dear Son. He has sanctified us by His Spirit. Christ Himself is our good shepherd, and we are His sheep. Let us beware, then (as the Psalm goes on to warn us), that we do nothing "to harden our hearts," as the Jews did; but looking forward to that "eternal rest which remains for the people of God,"¹ and

¹ Heb. iv. 9.

fearing lest we be deprived of entering therein, let us endeavour in all things, both in body and soul, to fulfil His holy will.

Here, in particular, I would direct your attention to one point of duty very necessary to be observed if we desire to please God. We read in the text, "Let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker." God having made man of two parts, body and soul, requires of him that in each part he should glorify his Maker. Not only is it necessary for the heart to be in communion with God, to love God, and to humble itself before Him; but also, in the worship of God, the body must bear its own share: "Oh, come, let us worship and fall down." This was what the ancient Christians did; this is what, even now, many Christians in other lands do. When they come before God, they not only worship, but also fall down. When they say their prayers, whether in public or in private, they actually bow down their bodies to the earth, in token of their humility and submissiveness before God. This even the heathens did in worshipping their false gods. I mean to say, they did not sit comfortably on seats while they prayed, but they bowed themselves down upon the very floor of their temples. Even they who worshipped the image which Nebuchadnezzar set up, "fell down and worshipped it."¹ Even Satan said, "If Thou wilt fall down and worship me."²

¹ Dan. iii. 5.

² Matt. iv. 9.

However, since, under certain circumstances, it might not be possible to fall down and worship, you will observe it is provided for in this Psalm, that at any rate those who do not bow down to the earth before God in their prayers, should at least kneel: "Oh, come, let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker." If we do not fall down before God in our public and private worship, which we might well do, at least we are bound to kneel. Neither can we have any hope that God will hear the prayers of our souls, unless, at the same time, we humble our bodies before Him.

This, my brethren, I seriously state to be a matter of the utmost importance, and yet, how very little is it attended to! Every one of you, indeed, when you say your private prayers at morning and evening, take care, as I do not doubt, to kneel, and you would think it most irreligious to say them sitting; yet, when you come to church, where, if possible, you ought to be still more careful to serve God with the very utmost degree of humility both of body and soul, how few amongst you really kneel down at your prayers! It is, indeed, the great curse of our congregations through the length and breadth of the land, that not one quarter of the people use any other posture than that of sitting, throughout the prayers. And I have asked myself, What can be the cause? How is it that Christians come to church for the sake of praying, and yet,

when they come to the very prayers, do not think it worth their while even to kneel? They think it worth while to walk to church, and to put themselves to some trouble in so doing; but when they are at church, even the bending of their knees is too much for them. What can be the cause of this? Surely there must be something very wrong amongst us that this should be the case.

I will now endeavour to shew you, first, that it is unnatural not to kneel; secondly, that we are taught to kneel both in the Old and New Testament; lastly, that we are required so to do by the rules which are given in the Prayer-book.

First, it is natural to kneel, and unnatural not to kneel, when we pray. Consider, then, that man consists of a mind and body, and these two are naturally connected together; the body being endued with such a power that, by its outward actions, it necessarily expresses the feelings of the mind. For instance, if a person is suddenly terrified in his mind, does not his body at once shew it, by putting itself into a particular attitude of defence? Or if a person is low-spirited in his mind, does not his body seem to droop? Or if he is in high spirits, does not his body appear more upright and full of life? And does not the outward appearance of the features in general shew a great part of what is going on in the mind? If the mind is sorrowful, does not the face appear cast

down? If “the heart be merry, does it not make a cheerful countenance?”¹ Now, in like manner, when the mind is in that solemn state which becomes a sinner who is about to address the Most Holy God in prayer, the body also will naturally put itself into a solemn and humble attitude. Thus even heathens, who have no revelation, and live by the rules of nature, even they in their prayers kneel down. And nature herself teaches little children to do the same. Those, therefore, who, when they come to church to pray, do not kneel down, are acting contrary to nature; and if contrary to nature, then contrary to the will of God; for nature is nothing else than the law of God.

But not only does nature require us to kneel, but, secondly, in Scripture we learn the same thing. “Oh, come, let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker.” So says the Psalmist in the text: not simply “Let us pray,” but “Let us kneel.” These words, you must remember, are words inspired by the Holy Ghost. Now I would ask, how is it possible that a Christian can be thinking much of what he is about, when at the commencement of the service he says these very words, “Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker,” and yet, after all, when it comes to the time for kneeling, never does kneel? For to kneel, is not simply to sit, or to lounge forward. To kneel is to

¹ Prov. xv. 13.

kneel down on our knees ; confessing both outwardly and inwardly our submissiveness before God. Accordingly St. Paul says, "Glorify God, in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."¹ Isaiah, again, prophesying of Christian times, writes, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth : for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto Me every knee shall bow."² To Christ, then, must every Christian bow down his knee ; and if he does not think it worth while to put himself to that trouble, he may be assured that Christ will not attend to what he says.

You see, then, that not only nature requires us to kneel, but Scripture also ; and for persons to sit while they pray is a custom dreadful to think of. For how can a man be really bowing himself down in humility and true self-abasement before God, while all the time he is evidently sitting completely at his ease ? And since our thoughts do of themselves wander in our prayers, even when we take great pains, how very much must the thoughts of those persons wander who will not be at the pains even to kneel !

Consider, further, that all those holy men of whom we read in Scripture thought it necessary to kneel. How requisite, therefore, must it be for us who are sinners, if it was requisite even for

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

² Is. xlv. 22, 23.

them who were saints ! For instance, Moses says of himself, that he “fell down before the Lord.”¹ Of Job we read that “he fell down on the ground and worshipped.”² Of Daniel, that “he kneeled three times a day on his knees.”³ Of Elijah, that “he put his face between his knees.”⁴ So far the saints of the Old Testament. And when Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to become also Son of Man, and not only to die for us, but to set us a perfect example how to live, He likewise knelt in His prayers. We read in St. Luke that “Jesus kneeled down and prayed.”⁵ And as Christ knelt to His Father, so did others kneel to Christ. Simon Peter “fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”⁶ Another time “there came a leper kneeling down to Him.”⁷ On another occasion “there came to Him a certain man kneeling down to Him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son.”⁸ These men knelt down before Christ when He was in the days of His flesh. Alas, many of us do not kneel before Him, even now that He is in His glory at the right hand of God. After the pattern of Christ, His Apostles and Martyrs were also accustomed to kneel in their prayers. “Stephen kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”⁹ Peter “kneeled

¹ Deut. ix. 18.

² Job i. 20.

³ Dan. vi. 10.

⁴ 1 Kings xviii. 42.

⁵ Luke xxii. 41.

⁶ Luke v. 8.

⁷ Mark i. 40.

⁸ Matt. xvii. 14.

⁹ Acts vii. 60.

and prayed.”¹ St. Luke says of himself, Paul, and others, “We kneeled down on the shore and prayed.”² St. Paul says of himself, “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;”³ shewing that his accustomed manner was to pray kneeling. And ever since those days Christians, both in public and private, have been used to kneel at their prayers. This has been the constant custom of the holy Catholic Church through all ages,—occasionally, indeed, to stand at prayer, generally to kneel; but never to sit at such a time.

This brings me to the third point which I have engaged to shew, namely, that in the Prayer-book all those who come to church are expressly commanded to kneel at the prayers. Look only at the directions given in the rubrics at Morning Service,—and first, at the general Confession, beginning, “Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep.” Now in what posture is this humble confession of our sins to be said? What says the rubric at the head of it? It says thus: “A general confession to be said of the whole congregation after the minister, all kneeling.” After the Confession follows the Absolution, “to be pronounced by the priest alone, standing; the people still kneeling.” The people, you see, are directed to remain still

¹ Acts ix. 40.

² Acts xxi. 5.

³ Ephes. iii. 14.

kneeling ; and it was never thought possible that any would be sitting at such a time. After this follows the Lord's Prayer ; what is the direction concerning it ? It is this : " Then the minister shall kneel, and say the Lord's Prayer with an audible voice ; the people also kneeling, and repeating it with him." After this the people are directed to stand till the end of the Belief ; but at the end of the Belief there comes this injunction, " After this these prayers following, all devoutly kneeling." Not only kneeling, but " kneeling devoutly ;" because it is possible even to kneel in a careless and slovenly manner. Then follow three collects : the first for the day, the second for peace, and the third for grace, " daily to be said at morning prayer throughout all the year, as followeth, all kneeling."

So far as regards the Morning Prayer ; and the same rules may be seen in the Evening Service. At the Communion it is the same ; there also the people are directed to kneel. And we may be assured that these directions of posture were not laid down without a good reason, namely, the desire to make persons better. For why is it that from year to year many persons do not seem to improve at all in religion ? The reason is, because they do not pray as they ought. And why do they not pray as they ought ? The reason is, because they will not take the trouble. But if only a person would kneel down devoutly whenever he prayed, even that

would be taking some trouble, and he would find the benefit of it, the very posture continually reminding him of what he was about.

First, then, you see it is natural to kneel, and unnatural not to kneel. Secondly, holy Scripture commands us to kneel, and our Lord and His saints have set us the example. Thirdly, the rules of our own communion require us to kneel. All this, then, being put together, it does appear quite wonderful and monstrous that Christians should ever have arrived at the habit of sitting during public prayer. For not only is this habit contrary to nature, to Scripture, and to the Church; but consider also how much real want of true humility of heart it shews, how much absence of fervency in devotion, how little understanding of the true nature of prayer!

And let no one say, in answer to all this, that he finds that, although he is sitting, he can still pray with his heart. For if it had been enough to pray with the heart only, how comes it to pass that all the holy men mentioned in Scripture did also pray with their bodies? and if a person can even contrive to pray in some degree while sitting, he should consider that if he can pray at all sitting, he would be able to pray much better kneeling. And most certain it is, we are all bound to be doing our best in all things for the glory of God, and to pray in the most earnest, and devotional, and best manner possible; neither can any person

know how much better he is able to pray kneeling than sitting until he tries.

If, again, men say that they have been in the habit of sitting at their prayers for a great many years past, this only renders the case worse ; for no length of custom can make that good which is in itself bad : but rather it is the greater sin to have continued in it so long. Some, indeed, there are, such as the infirm or very aged, who are really not able to kneel : to these it is their misfortune, not their privilege, to pray sitting. But of those who are here present almost all might kneel, if they chose ; and if they desire to please God, they certainly will kneel ; for it is impossible that healthy and strong men, who can discharge all their weekly business without feeling the worse for it, should of a sudden, when they come to church, become so faint as not to be equal to kneeling down, even for a short time.

Others, again, might say that they would kneel if they could, but that they have nothing to kneel upon. Yet this is no excuse ; for what can be the harm of kneeling upon a hard board for a short time ? If only in our hearts we desired to humble ourselves before God, we should rejoice to kneel down with our bare knees on the hardest rock.

May God grant us plentifully of His grace, that there may be in all of us less coldness, more warmth, more fervency, in our devotions to Him ! May He enable us to set one another an improving

example for the time to come! May He give us willing hearts, and an anxious desire to do whatsoever shall be for His glory, through Jesus Christ! May we remember that, if we serve Him at all, we must serve Him with our best; and may we have the wisdom to give ourselves some trouble in serving Him now, so that we may escape trouble hereafter!

SERMON XXV.

CONVERSATION IN HEAVEN.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 20.

“ Our conversation is in heaven ; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

THE great end which St. Paul had in view in all his epistles and preaching was, to bring men to the practice of a holy life ; so that, whilst still upon earth, they might be living, as it were, already in heaven. It is often said that example is better than precept. And so purified was that great Saint by the Holy Ghost, so exact in all his actions, that he was enabled, not only to preach holiness to his converts, but even to set himself before them as an example which they should follow. “ Brethren,” he says in the words preceding our text, “ be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.” Not that by this St. Paul meant to insinuate that he was perfect ; for he had just before, at the twelfth verse, confessed the contrary : “ Not as

though I had already attained, or were already perfect." Still, so far as he had attained, he knew himself to be in the right path. He knew that he was walking after the example of Christ. Therefore with confidence he set himself as an example to others. As, then, in another place he had said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ;" so here, having first declared that "this one thing he was doing," namely, "pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, forgetting those things which were behind, and reaching forth unto those things which were before," he beseeches the Philippians to follow him in the same course. And he says, not simply "be followers of me," but "be followers *together* of me;" because we are all baptised into one body, and, as members of one body, are all united one in another, partaking of the same faith and hope. Therefore, also, in all good works we should labour together; not each separate and apart from the other, but all as one—loving one another, helping one another, exhorting one another, confessing one to another, praying one for another.

In the next verse you will see the reason why St. Paul was so anxious that the Philippians should follow his own example, and set in their turn an example of Christian conduct to others,—namely, because there were already so many evil examples

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 1.

in the world; for, as was observed before, most persons are led by example more than by precept; and it is even more easy to follow bad examples than good.

“For many walk,” he goes on to say, “of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” Such were the bad examples which at that time surrounded the Church on all sides; men of whom St. Paul had often before warned his converts; and of whom he now warned them again, even weeping; that is to say, with the very greatest anxiety and earnestness, even to tears. And it is too true, that even still, in almost every place, there are such to be found. Of these how diligently ought we to beware! for nothing is so dangerous as evil example; and many who began life well have through this ended in destruction.

Observe what the Apostle says of these vicious men: “whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” All bad men make their belly—that is to say, their animal propensities—more or less their God. As in heathen nations they make idols of wood and stone, and worship them, so in Christian countries there are those who make idols of their own appetites, and fall down and serve them continually. The Apostle adds another mark of corruption:

“whose glory is in their shame.” Those who are far gone in sin have a sort of glory in their sinfulness, boasting of it to others. Thus, thieves are proud of their dexterity; and among profligate persons he is thought most highly of who is most profligate, while to be ashamed of sin is reckoned a great disgrace. Let the young, then, in particular be on their guard; and if they would avoid eternal destruction, let them take care how they ever boast of their sinful deeds, or go into company where such boasting is heard.

A third characteristic of a vicious man is stated by the Apostle to be this, that he “minds earthly things”—“whose end,” he says, “is destruction, whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” To mind earthly things means to have one’s mind taken up altogether with the things of this world. A bad man is not only sensual and devilish, but also earthly: his thoughts never mount above this world. This world and this life are his all in all. All his interest is about matters of the world, and he finds no pleasure in speaking of any thing else. He has sold himself over to the powers of this world, and to Satan, the God of this world; and “the end” of such a one is “destruction.” “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”¹ How anxiously, how seriously, should we be oftentimes examining ourselves, lest there grow up in us

¹ 1 John ii. 15.

a love of the world, and so we be separated from God! If to mind earthly things, to love the world, be one of the worst points in the worst of men, then how shocking it must be to think that we ourselves, who trust that we are walking in a Christian course, may nevertheless be secretly indulging a love of it! For this love being once admitted, all other evils find entrance.

St. Paul having thus described the case of those profligate men who set so evil an example in his own day, proceeds to shew how very different from this is the life of the true saint. "Walk," he says, "as you have us for an ensample; for our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Look upon the two pictures, and see what a difference there is. The sensual man minds earthly things; the conversation of the spiritual man is in heaven. The sensual man makes the vilest part of his nature his God; the spiritual man looks for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Our conversation," says St. Paul, "is in heaven." Although on earth, he was already living the life of one in heaven: heaven was, as it were, brought down upon earth; and in that heaven he was walking and had his home. His life was "hid with Christ in God;"¹ he was doing the will of God on earth as it is done by the angels in heaven. And this in its degree is the case with all those who live

¹ Col. iii. 3.

a godly life, and walk in the steps of the blessed Paul. Already in their baptism having been made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of heaven; having been “raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,”¹ they do not grovel on the earth and amid the things of earth; but remembering their high calling, are, as becomes them, “seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.”² As citizens of the heavenly courts, their conversation or mode of life is already heavenly. What a happy and most blessed state is this! and how earnest should we be in striving to reach it, by a daily attention to our duties, by constancy in prayer, and by earnest application to all those means of grace which Christ has given us in His Church! Oh, felicitous condition of those blessed beings who are continually growing in the love of God and of Christ! for in them the Holy Spirit inhabits as in a temple; and the Father and the Son are within them, as our Saviour has declared, “If any man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.”³ And what is this but heaven itself? For where the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost abide, there is heaven. So that to those who love God and serve Him “the kingdom of God is already

¹ Ephes. ii. 6.

² Col. iii. 1.

³ John xiv. 23.

within them,"¹ though they be on earth. They carry about a heaven with them wherever they go; and it may be seen from the very tranquillity of their countenances, and peacefulness, and charitableness, and innocence of their lives, that their conversation is in heaven, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.

St. Paul adds: "from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

In these words is set before us the great crown and prize of a Christian life, namely, that at the Resurrection the bodies of true Christians shall be transfigured into the likeness of the glorious body of Christ. This was the great hope and joy of St. Paul; and St. John dwells upon it as a deep source of comfort and cause of watchfulness to the Christian: "It doth not yet appear," he says, "what we shall be: but we know that, when Christ shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."²

This is a consideration which we should do well often to bring before ourselves: Christ was once on earth, felt and seen, eating and drinking with men. He has long left the earth; but He will

¹ Luke xvii. 21.

² 1 John iii. 2.

come again on a certain day which God hath appointed; we who live now, and have never seen Him, but have only read and heard of Him, shall then ourselves behold Him; for it is written, “every eye shall see Him;”¹—how can we sufficiently impress our minds with this fact: that the same Christ concerning whom we read in the gospels we ourselves shall one day actually meet face to face, and receive from His own divine lips the sentence either of our condemnation or of our glorification through all Eternity? This is what a great many Christians do not sufficiently reflect upon: they read of what Christ did and said, as recorded in the gospels, as though it were something altogether past and gone by; whereas the truth is, that they themselves are interested beyond what the mind can conceive in all those things, since the same Christ is to come again.

You will observe that, in describing here the true Christian, whose conversation is in heaven, St. Paul marks it as a particular feature in his character, that he is looking for the second coming of Christ; for he says, “from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” In writing to the Corinthians, he speaks in the same way: “Ye come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ;”² and to the Thessalonians, “Ye wait for His Son from heaven;”³ and to Titus he says, “Looking for that blessed hope,

¹ Rev. i. 7.

² 1 Cor. i. 7.

³ 1 Thess. i. 10.

and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”¹ So that we may consider a patient waiting for Christ to be the characteristic of the Christian: for certainly those who love Christ will be anxious for the time when they may behold Him and be with Him for ever. Let us try ourselves by this test, and consider whether, in any true sense, we are actually looking forward to and desiring His coming. This will shew us whether or not we are truly advancing in religion: for if we find that we are not waiting for the coming of Christ, it is a sign that there is something wrong in us, and that we love the world more than we love Him.

St. Paul, as we have seen, concludes this portion of the epistle with reminding us of that great transformation which, at the coming of Christ, awaits mankind. Two resurrections there are: one of the just to glorification, another of the wicked to condemnation; and in either case the body will undergo a change, and become spiritual, so as to be capable of everlasting bliss or eternal torment.

The saints of God, or true Christians, have this exceeding comfort before them, that this vile body which they have now, and which is subject to pain and corruption, shall in that day be changed into the fashion of the glorious body of Christ. Than this what can be more glorious,—to become like

¹ Tit. ii. 13.

unto the Son of God in His glorified human nature? Observe St. Paul says, "who shall change our vile body." From this we see that the present body, although it become corrupt in the grave, will not absolutely perish, but will be so reserved and protected by the eternal providence of the God of nature, from generation to generation, even to the end of the world, that then its elements shall be capable of a change, and shall actually be restored in a more glorious fashion than before: instead of corruptible, incorruptible; instead of mortal, immortal. Just as our present bodies, in the creation of the first man, were made from the dust of the earth, so shall the future body be made from the dust of that which shall become corrupt in the grave; so that the new body will not be a new elemental creation, but a resuscitation and transformation of the old. This is a great mystery; how it will be brought to pass we cannot discover. We know not even how the seed changes into the flower; but that it does so we see. In this matter, if we trusted to reason alone, we might soon involve ourselves in endless perplexities; but faith makes all things easy. St. Paul shews us that there is a power which can effect this; for, to cut short all difficulty, he finishes with declaring the wonderful might of Christ: this change, he says, shall be brought to pass "according to the working whereby Christ is able even to subdue all things unto Himself." To Him, by Whom in the

beginning all things were made, it is very little, when He shall so please, to transform all.

Eternal praise be to His holy name that, together with His great power, He has also a great love of us ; that, out of this His great love, He has promised also to exert this His great power on behalf of us sinners ; and that, provided we suffer with Him here, He has engaged Himself to make us partakers, both in body and soul, of His own endless felicity hereafter.

SERMON XXVI.

THE WORLD PERISHABLE, THE CHRISTIAN IMPERISHABLE.

1 JOHN ii. 17.

“The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

THERE are two things which we constantly find opposed to one another in Holy Scripture—the world, which passes away; and the word of God, which does not pass away. This opposition, it is to be observed, is not only occasionally or accidentally introduced to our notice in a few texts scattered here and there; but is, in a manner, the entire burden of the Bible from the beginning to the end of it. In every page almost of that Holy Book we have again and again brought to our view the great difference between “the things which are seen, which are temporal, and the things which are not seen, which are eternal:”¹ “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.”² This, indeed, was said once for all by

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

² Matt. xxiv. 35.

our Saviour; but the same sentiment, inspired by the same Spirit, runs through the whole of Revelation. On the one hand, we have set before us the house built on the sand, which is easily washed away by the first storm; on the other hand, the house built on the rock, which no storm can destroy. On the one hand, we have the perishable and perishing things of this world, which cannot last for any length of time, but must always be shifting and changing and falling to pieces, like the clouds which break up and alter at every the least breath of wind: on the other hand, we have the everlasting unchangeable Godhead, His truth and His righteousness enduring through all ages; His promises certain and sure as His own Being; His gifts unfading treasures, which neither moth can corrupt nor rust destroy; His statutes more enduring than the heavens; His love imperishable as Eternity.

Such is the distinction which is always being set forth in the Bible between the fading things of this world and the crown reserved in heaven which “fadeth not away.”¹ It breaks out, so to say, in all sorts of ways and forms, in psalms, in parables, in prophecies, in histories, in epistles, in the whole circle of thought which Scripture contains. Of all which our text is but one single illustration, cast in plain words, which no man can mistake. “The world passeth away, and the lust

¹ 1 Peter v. 4.

thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

Here we have two things opposed one to another—the world, and he that doeth the will of God.

Of the world it is said, that it passeth away; of him that doeth the will of God it is said, that he abideth for ever. Let us consider these two declarations in their turn.

And, first, that the world passeth away: this let me call the lesson of life; for it is from life, and our experience in it, that we learn this. That he who doeth the will of God abideth for ever: this let me call the lesson of Scripture; for this we learn from Inspiration only. From life we learn that the world passeth away; a lesson well worth the learning, if persons would but attend to it; but by itself of little use, if it be not joined with that other lesson of Scripture, “My words shall not pass away.”

Consider, then, that lesson of life which all must learn sooner or later, that the world passeth away. And this there are many ways of learning; so many, that time would fail in shewing the exceeding perishableness of even the very best gifts which depend for their foundation on this world alone.

Only recollect, for instance, what those who have been even slightly educated amongst us know from what they have read of history. How empires

have succeeded upon empires in the procession of past ages ; each thought sure to last by the historians and mighty men of its own time ; each, however, obliterated either suddenly or by degrees, and giving place to some new kingdom, new races of men, new forms, new polities, which in their turn again have become old and perished. This, in particular, we have learnt as respects the four great Empires mentioned in prophecy, Assyria, Persia, Græcia, and Rome ; how they have been swept away, leaving few vestiges, those vestiges no better than ruins of ruins, scattered over the world in perpetual desolations, continual mementos of that fate which in due time awaits all the pride and pomp and glory of present monarchies and empires.

Then, again, consider the lives which we have left us of the great men of former times, how very little there is recorded of what seemed so much to each of them ; so that, in respect to the greatest men, very often scarce a fragment of their history remains to us ; little being known but that they lived and that they died. How they thought, how they acted, their fears, their hopes, their disappointments, their perplexities from day to day, their friends, their relations, their conversations, their schemes,—all this has perished away from our knowledge, as though it had never been. This is true even of the famous of former times ; but as for the many millions who lived in obscurity, and never became notorious in the world, of

all these it is utterly unknown even that they existed; their very names are perished away, and have left nothing behind, in the book of the world's history, but a desolate blank, impossible to be filled up till that day when the throne shall be set and the books opened, and great and small shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, and be judged out of the books, according to their works.¹

Then, too, turning from the history of former generations of the world, consider the world itself—this earth on which we tread—what vicissitudes it has suffered from the time of its creation; how first it lost Eden; was then deluged by a flood which covered the highest mountains, and raising up lands from the depths of the seas, left us shells for our wonder on the tops of our hills; how, since that time, its surface has continually been changing by earthquakes and other causes; cities springing up where forests once spread in interminable gloom; fields spreading over buried cities; rivers altering their course; air and climate varying; generations of animals becoming extinct; and, in fact, the whole earth changing its external appearance, like a mantle which is put on and off, as though it were impossible for it to remain the same, but that it must go on for ever from change to change, till that last great change of all, when “the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the

¹ Rev. xx. 12.

earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up, and give place to a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."¹

These considerations, if fairly weighed and dwelt upon with common attention, are enough to shew us that the world passeth away, and are in a manner the lesson of life, because they come to us from the experience of former generations, transmitted to us on the page of history.

But to come now to the more immediate lesson of life, common to all individuals who now live,—I mean their own personal experience,—is not the lesson still the same, that the world passeth away?

Call to mind in your recollection what great changes, even in but a short number of the years lately past, have occurred both in your own situation and in that of your relations and friends and all around you. Call to mind how many plans of life you may, in former times, have proposed to yourself, and which seemed to you then certain and unchangeable; yet nevertheless have those plans vanished and passed away. How transformed are the views of your life now from what they were but ten years since! How many interruptions have intervened, upon which you did not then calculate! How many things have turned up which you could not then have foreseen, and did not even dream of! How have your own ideas, and habits, and principles, on many sub-

¹ 2 Peter iii. 10.

jects altogether altered! How many things which then seemed important, and, it may be, all in all to you, have since then shrunk into nothing, and become so trivial in your eyes as scarce to seem deserving of notice! How, on the other hand, have many matters, of which then you thought nothing, swelled and grown into vast importance, affecting all your present views in life! The older a man is, and the more he has seen and the more he has reflected, the more will he confess that, so far as his own particular experience is concerned, "the world passeth away." This none will deny. They may deny Christianity, they may even deny God Himself; but none will deny "that the world passeth away," that it is in continual transformation, and cannot for a moment be depended upon as certain and sure. For even the very best and purest earthly happiness is subject to the same common law which belongs to all things that are of the world; namely, first to change, and then to perish altogether, leaving, in a few years, no more trace behind than the arrow which has passed through the air.

All this, then, appearing to us from our brief experience,—to us who live but a short time in the world,—how much more perishable must the whole scene of this world appear to Him "in whose eyes a thousand years are but as yesterday, seeing that is past as a watch in the night!"¹ To God,

¹ Ps. xc. 4.

who views all things as they really are, what a perishable of perishables must appear this world in which we bear our part; and how needful for us it is that we should oftentimes consider whether we are trusting to this evanescent scene, or resting for our support on the Rock of Ages, Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," our only true hope and joy, imperishable amid all that is perishing, enduring amid all that is passing away.

And this brings me to the second part of our text, "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever;" which, as distinguished from the lesson of life, I have called the lesson of Scripture—a lesson and a truth which duly to weigh and to act upon is to be a Christian indeed. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." It is not enough, you see, to know the will of God; we are required also to do it: that is, to live as in God's sight, to be conformed to the image of Christ, obediently to follow His steps, to be sanctified by the Holy Ghost, daily to praise God without ceasing, continually to mortify what is evil in our nature, fearing God and keeping His commandments, and loving man because Christ loved us and gave Himself for us: and whosoever thus acts, of him it is said that he abideth for ever, in contradistinction to the world, which passeth away. He abideth for ever! Oh, happy Christian, whoever he be! There is no fear for him, amid all that is perishing round him and about him on

all sides. His house is built on a rock, that spiritual rock which is Christ. His hopes rest on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which, through all revolutions of the world, has remained firm from the beginning. He has put his trust in God, and knows well that His providence watches over him; that nothing happens without God's permission even in this perishable world in which he lives; and that all things must needs "work together for good to them that love Him."¹ He knows, moreover, that there is a mansion prepared for him eternal in the heavens; that there all the righteous shall abide for ever, when the elements shall have melted with fervent heat, and the earth shall have passed away.

Such is the condition of the true Christian, calm and tranquil in the midst of the perplexity and confusion of life, because he rests on something sure and certain, which cannot possibly be taken from him. Such ought to be the state of all persons who have been made Christians, purchased by the blood of Christ into an inheritance incorruptible. But, oh, how far short of this state do many of us fall, who yet know and believe that this is the true view of things! How comes it to pass, that, feeling beneath us a firm foundation, which cannot be shaken, around us the arms of an everlasting Providence, above us the mercies of an all-forgiving God reconciled in Christ, before us an

¹ Rom. viii. 28.

incorruptible mansion, “where neither moth nor rust do corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal,”—how comes it to pass that, knowing all this, we yet, in the practice of our daily life, do not act up to this high profession?

Alas, we are miserable—we are sinful. We are spiritually persuaded of the truth of these things, but our carnal mind almost betrays us to deny them in our lives: else why is it that so many Christians who profess and believe themselves to be struggling for a crown incorruptible, yet, in the daily concerns of their lives, allow this perishing state to have more influence over them than becomes that faith which is the “evidence of things not seen?”¹

Oh, let us sorrowfully confess, that we are wrong in suffering ourselves to be so easily disquieted and distracted by the things of this world, which passeth away, knowing so well as we do that “he who doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” Let us acknowledge that we are faulty in suffering our thoughts to be so easily carried off by the thousands of trivial objects which this passing scene supplies, while our hearts turn with difficulty and laziness to “Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the innumerable company of Angels, and to the general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all,

¹ Heb. xi. 1.

and to the Spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.”¹

On these things, which only are imperishable, which only are eternal, we think, I fear, far less than we ought; and thus isolating ourselves amid the things that are seen, wander along solitary in our pilgrimage, troubled and unsettled by the shifting and changing objects of this world; whereas, in deed and in truth, God has not left us solitary, but, through Christ the Mediator, and the Holy Ghost the Comforter, has given to us to have a part and portion with the things that are unseen, unchanging, incorruptible.

Consider how, from your earliest years, you have been accustomed to acknowledge indeed with your lips that the world passeth away, yet always to act nevertheless as though you could count upon it. Occasionally, perhaps, you have thought seriously of Christ's promises, which never yet disappointed a human being; but this was only for a time. Again have you been fascinated by this illusive, this enchanting world, and have learnt to trust to it still more than ever. The Prince of this world has blinded your eyes, and enticed you away in one shape or another. He has dressed up his own world for you in its best colours; he has drawn your eyes to it, till at last, by having your mind continually fixed upon the world, which passeth away, you have grown to resemble it in its

¹ Heb. xii. 24.

fickleness and inconstancy. Nothing satisfies you for any length of time. At morning you say, "Would to God it were evening!"—at evening, "Would to God it were morning!" Uneasy in heart and conscience, without a genuine hope of better things to come, with no secure resting-place for your foot amid the tumults of life, abusing the world and its gifts, loving it, hating it, fearing it, despising it, forsaking it, and returning to it again, you still continue to grasp at its flitting shadows, forgetful, or rather not choosing to remember, that "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Alas, what numbers of this class are there to be found in the world; persons who at one time may have believed themselves fitted for better things—may have longed for the eternal, the unchanging, the imperishable; but because they neglected to do the will of God,—because, instead of this, they made their choice to go along with the perishing world, and live by it and for it,—have become at last, as the Apostle says, "conformed" to it; that is to say, a part and parcel of it, changing with it as it changes, tainted with its sinfulness and perishableness, and walking in their own darkness.

To use the world, and yet not abuse it: this is the Christian's privilege. Let us seek, by earnest prayer, for this grace, which many of us, it is to be feared, have nearly lost. Let us turn

betimes to those better hopes of better things which endure for ever in heaven, and which God has prepared before the foundation of the world for those that love Him. Let us search after that peace which passeth knowledge—a peace not given as the world gives it, to alter and perish like itself, but fixed and settled and sure, abiding for ever in our hearts while we are here on earth, and brightening up more and more into perfect joy, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality.

Now, to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Three Persons and One God, be all honour, glory, power, might, majesty, and dominion, henceforward for ever. Amen.

NOTE.

In the Sermon on the Wise Men, where it is said, at the end, that Christ “for our sakes entered the ignorant state of childhood,” the term ‘ignorant’ is merely used as an epithet of childhood. It is not intended to intimate by it, that the soul of Christ united to the Eternal Godhead was actually ignorant at any period of His Incarnation.

THE END.

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