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SIX UNIVERSITY
SERMONS



SECOND EDITION



SIX SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD, IN ST. MARY'S
CHURCH,

IN THE YEARS 1837, 1838, 1839,

BY

SAMUEL (*NOW*) LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD

CHANCELLOR OF THE MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE CARTER
AND LORD HIGH ALMONER TO THE QUEEN.

“ Let us follow after . . . things wherewith one may
edify another.”

ROM. xiv. 19.



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WILLIAM PICKERING

1848

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE first two Sermons only of this set have any direct connexion with each other ; and it is important that they should be read together : for some expressions of the first, taken by itself, might seem to favour that view which the second is specifically intended to counteract. The Author is deeply convinced that the combination of these two views is an especial feature of Christ's Gospel : that, whilst there is provided in it for every penitent a full assurance of his free forgiveness ; and whilst it is his duty as well as his privilege to realise this truth, and bring it clearly out, as the spring of his future obedience, instead of doubting the assured mercy of his heavenly Father,—there is in it also a most clear declaration, that indulged sin does deprave the moral nature ; put a man back in his course ; and so leave him after repen-

tance, not, indeed, a whit the less accepted of God in Christ, but, with evil done to his own soul, and ground actually lost, which repentance does not at once remove or regain, though it gives him anew the opportunity of removing the one, and regaining the other.

On giving these Sermons to the press, at the request of many by whom they were listened to with great attention, and by whom, he trusts, they may be read with profit, the Author desires to express his obligation for different trains of thought, especially in the fifth Sermon, to the conversation of a friend, from an unpublished manuscript of whose he has quoted a few words in the 154th page. Many also of the thoughts contained in the last Sermon, may, he doubts not, be traced to the "Letters on the Kingdom of Christ," by the Rev. F. Maurice, which he had recently been reading when that Sermon was written.

BRIGHSTONE RECTORY,

June, 1839.

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SERMON I.
THE MORAL CONSEQUENCES OF
PERMITTED SIN.

SERMON I.

“ We then as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”

2 Cor. vi. 1.

THIS passage of Holy Scripture, with which the Church meets us on the first Sunday in Lent, contains an earnest charge to all those who, of God's grace, have been made partakers of the heavenly calling, not to use carelessly their high privilege, or content themselves with rendering a slight and common measure of obedience. Bringing before them the cost and hazard at which the Gospel had been preached amongst them, it urges them, on their part, to use its discipline aright, by “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” It reminds us, in a word, of the absolute necessity laid on us of employing earnestly the means of grace now afforded us for resisting present temptation ;

and not excusing lightly any sin, whilst we build rashly on the chance of future amendment.

There was, no doubt, an especial fitness in the address of such a charge to the Church of the redeemed at Corinth; lest, in that learned and luxurious city, the Gospel of Christ should be received as some new form of speculative philosophy; or lest its gracious promises should be made the fatal excuse of a loose and sensual life.

And no less appropriate is the caution to our peculiar character in this favoured place. To those who, in their signal opportunities for a religious life, have here "received" in large measure "the grace of God," it had need to be a matter of anxious watchfulness, that they "receive" it "not in vain:" lest, hedged in by the necessary proprieties of a religious life, and shining in the lustre of hereditary piety, they forget that they are hereby called to higher measures of personal holiness, and so perchance, instead, sink down contentedly into a speculative orthodoxy of faith, and a self-indulgent decency of living.

Still more needful is it to those for whom now first the stricter bonds of early discipline have been relaxed, and to whose unascertained character there seems to be allowed a license of action which will be withheld in after-life. They are on every side invited to partake freely of present pleasures ; while they are flattered with the promised opportunity of a future repentance. They deem it natural, that the thoughtlessness, or even the vice of youth, should be succeeded by a more becoming maturity ; and their general acquaintance with the Gospel of salvation still further suggests to them an undefined hope of pardon and of grace. You, therefore, above all, must we “ beseech, as workers together with Him, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain ;” that you lose not your present opportunities of good, and inflict upon your souls abiding injury. And when the cunning tempter takes up the whisper of evil desire, and bids you “ Rejoice, O young man, in the days of thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth,

and walk in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes," we must remind you, though it seem a stern message, that "for all these things God will bring you into judgment:" that, by the very constitution of our nature, these things have an enduring effect upon us; that they do not pass away, and leave the character what it was before; but that they stamp upon it the abiding features of guilt and shame. This is a point which deserves our closest attention. Sin appears to us in the separation of successive temptations, as a number of unconnected actions, which may at any moment be checked or interrupted: but the truth is, that every sin has certain inward consequences; that, not only our acceptance with the holy God, but our own moral constitution, is altered, by the commission of every act of iniquity; and that even if the sinner could at once be forgiven by God, by an act of sovereign and partial favour, still he would not be in the same condition that he was before; because there would remain in his very nature the accursed consequences of past pollution.

This is what shall now be put before you in detail ; in the earnest hope, that when the offered cup of the sorceress sparkles before your eyes, you may turn away with loathing from the draught whose enchantments must work upon you so foul a transformation.

A very few words will suffice to establish this first point—that the commission of sin has naturally a debasing effect upon the moral constitution ; not even when passed away leaving the soul in its former condition, but, by the very necessity of the case, degrading and corrupting it. The slightest observation of ourselves or others must at once shew us that one sin paves the way for another ; and that, not only by growing into a habit, and so providing for its own recurrence, but also by leading to the commission of other acts of iniquity. We see daily, that one sin prepares the soul which harbours it for the admission of evils different from itself in kind, and which have no other connexion with it than that they are of the same sinful nature : that, in the natural course of things,

the heart which has been polluted by loose and evil living, soon begins to doubt, and then goes on to disbelieve all which God has taught us concerning Him and ourselves; and so it happens commonly, that a licentious youth is followed by an unbelieving age; or at the best, that such an old age is harassed and worn down by haunting doubts.

So far is perfectly plain. And now notice further, that it is altogether out of a man's power to undo this evil, and replace himself in his former state. This may be seen, first, in the power with which sinful habits oppress their victim. How common is it to see men—against what they know to be their interest, against their strongest resolutions, against their peace, and health, and character—going on in a course of sin, to which they are in slavery, even while they hate it. These strugglings of the soul, in the sure grasp of a sinful habit, are truly a fearful sight to witness:—to see the agony of earnestness with which a man will resolve against his sin in the pauses of temptation,

and yet fall as soon as the hour of his trial comes:—to see him continue in this bitter course of reluctant but repeated transgression, bemoaning, perhaps, his misery that ever he began it, until it is closed, at last, by the hardened impenitence of despair. Or if for awhile the evil habit appear to be subdued, how constantly will it again resume its sway! The seemingly extinct volcano has but slept to outward observation, and its new eruption shews that the inward tumult has always raged without abatement. How plain, in these cases, are the moral consequences of sin, and the impotence of man to remove them!

And so they are in another case, which seems, at first sight, to be an exception to the rule. Outward circumstances will often alter sinful habits, and the man seems to be reformed: but a closer observation does not confirm this flattering promise. The passions of youth, perhaps, have burnt out, and the more cautious sins of maturer years have sprung up, and in some degree conceal the blackened

soil. But no one can watch such persons carefully, without perceiving, that, except in its outward expression, the habit of the mind remains unchanged; that sensuality still rules, though its robe is more seemly, and its sceptre gilt afresh. In the judgments such men form of others; in their secret lingering love of forsaken vice; in their bold familiarity with sin; in a sleepy conscience and polluted imagination,—they bear about with them a dreadful record of past transgression. The act of sin is gone; but the stain is rather deepened than worn out.

And earthly teaching knows of no cure for such disorders; it has no skill to undo the effects of vice. You may, as in some hopeless cases of bodily infirmity, substitute a different form of evil; you may change the disease, but man cannot cure it. You may reclaim the sinner from open vice; you cannot renew him to holiness; you may exchange his ruling sin; but you cannot give him again the tender conscience, the pure imagination, the unquestioning loyalty

of affection, the reality and truth of ready belief, with which God had furnished his heart before sin had corrupted it. These things man cannot restore : he has no fountain of perpetual youth for such enfeebled souls ; human means may strike in the leprous taint, but it cannot make the “flesh to come again like unto the flesh of a little child.” With what an awful character does this view of its effects invest permitted sin ! It throws some light upon the terrible sentence of eternal death ; because it shows the unchanging character, and explains, therefore, the unchanged condition of a soul which moral evil has thoroughly defiled.

So much, then, for the natural consequence of sin : and now let us view it in connexion with that general hope of future restoration, through the working of the blessed Spirit, by which many encourage themselves in iniquity, and so, beyond all others, “receive the grace of God in vain.” And here let it be remembered, that it is the ordinary mode of the Holy Spirit’s

working upon man, as revealed to us in Scripture, and seen in life, with which we have to do. For who shall dare to stake his salvation upon an unwarranted hope, that God will, in some unusual way, interfere in his behalf? The Holy Spirit, then, we are taught, acts upon the minds of the regenerate members of Christ's Church, in suggesting good and restraining evil, not by an irresistible constraint, but as on reasonable beings in a state of trial and discipline. Even from the first dawning of the moral powers, it thus acts upon us. Who has not known, in his earliest years, this secret voice reproving his childish transgressions? who has not known times, when thoughts and desires better than his own were stored within his mind; times when the affections yearn after what we think God to be? when the words of pious teaching, which even from our infancy the Church has spoken to us, and which seem long since to have passed away, wake again from forgetfulness, and as by a real presence commune with our spirits? times

when a longing for something better and more real than this world can give, settles upon our weary souls ; and we perceive that even the best things in it are but a veil, which severs us from God? In these ways the blessed Spirit acts upon our minds ; and if in these He be not resisted, His holy work will at the last, and in His good time, be perfected within us : for when we are tried, we answer to our trial ; and then “ to him that hath shall more be given,” and the grace of God shall dwell in us more abundantly. And in our training, too, we answer to our discipline ; for our own souls become more pure—there is more good wrought into their nature, and their remaining evil is continually subdued ; we live more in the presence of Christ our Master ; we hear His words ; and we grow almost unawares, to love and serve Him better. Of old, it was by a great trial, and, it may be, after a sharp struggle, that the mind was turned away from earthly and fixed upon heavenly things ; but now that the habit of acting every day as in the sight of things unseen,

is more and more matured, it mounts up, oftentimes, readily and of itself, towards heaven.

And so, too, the power of temptations to evil becomes daily weaker. In the beginning of the man's course there was more sin within his heart; and this sin was easily stirred up, and not to be put down without a struggle; the conversation or the conduct of others would suggest thoughts of sin, and kindle within himself evil tempers and desires: but now that he has striven earnestly against these inclinations, and they, by God's grace, have become more strange to his soul, there is less within himself to answer to evil from without; the trumpet still sounds before the gates of the city, but there are within few rebels to give heed to it: so that not merely are his resolutions against sin firmer than of old, nor is it only that God's Spirit, dwelling more within him, arms him with a greater strength against it; but that temptations of themselves diminish; those things now no longer harass him which are still a grievous trial to infirm believers.

But in him who communes with any sin, the opposite to all of this is in a sure progress ; for when he is tried, by the restraints of God's grace aiding him against some temptation, he fails, by giving way to sin ; and then the Holy Spirit is grieved, and withdraws His blessed influence. At the same time moreover, his moral discipline is changed into a progress in corruption : for while good desires become less frequent in his soul as the Holy Spirit leaves him, evil thoughts spring up in it with greater abundance ; outward evil finds a ready correspondence in his depraved heart ; and as temptations to sin of themselves decrease with growing holiness, so do they multiply upon increasing iniquity. To such an one the simplest words of innocence become unhal- lowed allusions, tempting him to loose and evil imaginations. As to a body weakened by disease, the mere common air, when let to breathe upon it, becomes a cause of sick- ness and of death ; so to these sick souls is every ordinary accident of life a new occasion of temptation, and a cause of sin. Every

sense becomes an inlet of corruption ; holy things themselves do but stir up evil. The words of sacred Scripture, or the teaching of the Church, now only kindle trains of earthly thought or carnal imagination : even “hillock of sand” can “make” a trembling foot “to stumble ;” a spark can light up a flame when all things are ready for the burning. In this polluted mind and conscience the dreadful threatening is accomplished—“The evil spirit enters into him, and *dwells there,*”—makes the heart its accustomed abode, so that at all seasons evil thoughts spring up readily in it, and all desires of good are quenched and extinguished. After this, comes doubt ; and at the next stage, a settled unbelief. When this new form of temptation first presents itself, it is, perhaps, regarded with alarm ; but the degrading influence of sin soon destroys that reality which marks the faith of childhood, and which, even in maturer years, God’s grace can keep undestroyed. And now there is a secret under-current of desires, which is helping on these evil doubts ; for it is the interest of the

wicked, that religion should be false ; and so they soon fasten upon the mind, and grow into unbelief. This is indeed, whatever we may deem of it, an awful state—when the Spirit of the Lord is grieved, and He is gone ; when Satan has been tempted, and he is come. And who that, counting upon future aid, thus sins against the gift of baptismal grace,—who that receives in vain the gifts and restraints of childhood, and youth, and maturity,—has any right to hope that he shall ever desire again to return from that iniquity which he has made his choice ; that he shall ever seek in earnest to have the evil one cast out, who, in the mightiness of his accursed strength, he has brought to dwell within him ; or that sin and its degrading consequences shall be again dislodged from his pampered sensual body, or debased and polluted spirit ? And have we not, then, abundant reason to “ beseech you, not to receive the grace of God in vain,”—to beg you to resist the tempting baits of sinful indulgence, lest you now do that which you can never again undo,—lest you pollute a soul,

which, when once utterly corrupted, must remain corrupt for ever,—lest you now stifle the whispered warnings of the blessed Spirit, which would have carried on the work of sanctification till you were meet for heaven ; but which, once stifled, you may hear again no more for ever, till they change into the sentence of condemnation and the clamours of hell ?

And here let me remind you distinctly, that this guilt and danger are not confined to *great* sinners ; that it is not so much any positive *degree* of vicious excess which thus affects the soul ; but—the failing in your moral probation,—the neglecting to employ aright the blessings God has given you in his Church, and so turning those opportunities of grace into the means of pollution. It is not, therefore, to daring sinners alone, though to them above all, that this caution belongs. The danger attaches to all those who are not living up to the measure of God's grace imparted to them ; who are not employing their present circumstances to obtain these intended blessings ;—to the

ambitious, the indolent, and worldly ; as well as to the carnal and profane ;—to those who, by fixing them upon the trifles of innocent pleasure, or the toys of worldly distinction, are wasting that freshness of youth and ardour of spirit which were given them by God that they might search out truth with a greater earnestness, and follow His ways with a more zealous love ; —to those who are not using the religious opportunities of this place ; as well as to those who are delighting to find in it occasions of sin ;—to those who are unlearning the simplicity of childish piety, and making the daily Church-offices a heavier bondage and a wearier task ; as well as to those who are learning to take an evil pleasure in the orgies of intemperance and the sallies of profaneness.

But in some, perhaps, this wholesome fear may be even now relieved (for so, in the mystery of this world, does one man's sin become another's temptation) by the apparent escape of others from these perilous consequences of a sinful youth. And yet

this is, in truth, a desperate calculation. Were it the many, instead of the few, even to appearance, who escaped, yet who could assure us that we should not be found amongst those few? And what reasonable man would venture otherwise on such a hazard, where the stake is his eternal welfare? And even amongst these few and favoured examples, how shall we discover who do, after all, escape? After-decency of life is no proof of it whatever; secondary causes are abundantly sufficient to account for such an outward change; and who can look into another's heart? Fearful, doubtless, too often were the sight of such a soul, could it be viewed as it is seen by God—seen as it appears to Him, in the coldness towards heavenly things which overspreads a heart whose early tenderness of religious emotion has died away without producing habits of active obedience,—in its lurking unfaithfulness under the means of grace,—in its allowed secret communion with evil imaginations,—in its continually rarer acts of repentance, and constantly increasing per-

missions of sin,—in its hypocrisy, in one word, ripening into unbelief.

Are there then none recovered from this state? are none delivered even from these depths of Satan? Doubtless, of God's mercy, there are some; and great monuments they are of the cleansing power of His Holy Spirit. But even in that deliverance there is nothing to encourage sin. You presume upon their escape, in entire ignorance of the particulars of their moral discipline. Who can say surely of himself, that he is indeed like them in guilt,—that he is not sinning against clearer knowledge, against the sharper reproofs of a more enlightened conscience, against greater restraints of the blessed Spirit,—that for *him* this may not be the last trial, and these the last sins on this side final impenitence?

And, to take one case more, if you could be sure of escaping at the last, yet still there is nothing to encourage you in sin. For even where it has pleased God, by the mighty powers of grace stored up for penitents within His Church, to heal in great

measure this early wound, who can estimate aright either the pain of the process, or the incompleteness of the recovery? It is not by less than a furnace-heat that such dross is purged away, and the redeemed soul which has communed willingly with sin cleansed again from its pollution. It is, at best, by a sore struggle that the consequences of sinful habits must be subdued: "This kind cometh not out but by prayer and fasting." How often against such an one, in his secret strife with the enemy, do long-past and perhaps forgotten transgressions spring up again in present temptations! How often, even in the process of recovery, do hard, ambitious, unchaste, or unbelieving thoughts well out from his heart, and trouble the time of meditation or the hour of prayer! With what a weary earnestness does he thirst for the purity and simplicity of childhood, when evil thoughts were as yet strange to his heart, and God, and heaven, and grace, were, without any struggle, invisible realities! Though, of God's great mercy, his sun

shines out again, and the stormy sky is clearing over him, how far is he even yet from the freshness of a holy morning! How painful, yet how just a sentence is it upon many penitent souls, that they are thus “made to possess the iniquities of their youth!”

So far, indeed, from the example of these recovered souls affording ground to any for continuing in sin, the very language of encouragement in which alone we can address them, is a testimony to the bitterness of its consequences. The very promises of help, and all the gracious messages which God has stored up in His Church to support and cheer such returning sinners, even these have a double sound; and while they are as balm to them, they should be a wholesome terror unto you. We can, indeed, tell them not to despair; we can say, that even for them there is a healing power in God's grace: but we cannot promise them a speedy deliverance from that bitter fruit of their own ways with which they now are filled; we must rather bid them bear their burden

patiently, nor fret against God's way of healing them, but take up the bitter cross of present suffering, meekly acknowledging that it is indeed a fearful thing to have polluted a soul which God created holy. Surely the knowledge of this difficult and painful cure cannot encourage us to trifle with the same disease. And even, after all, they are commonly restored to a condition far below that to which they might have once attained. The whole analogy of nature teaches us, that even if the vital powers struggle on through early sickness into the health of maturer years, yet that they still bear in their diminished power and energy the marks of former conflict; and so is it in spiritual growth. Few of the most encouraging examples in God's word, and but one of the bright lights of Christian antiquity, give us reason to expect in such recovered souls the *perfect* measure of simplicity or peace.

And are the joys of sin worth even this price? Was it for this that you were born, baptised, and striven with; for this that

the Church of Christ has shielded and instructed and nourished you ; for this that Christ your Master fasted, fought, and died ; for this that you were grafted into Him, and He Himself given to dwell in you ? Oh, no ; even on this, the fairest shewing, we cannot too earnestly “ beseech you not to receive the grace of God in vain ; ” for He saith, “ I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in a day of salvation have I succoured thee : behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation. ” Bear ever in mind to what it is that we are called,—to a holy calling,—to company with saints,—to copy angels, yea, to be made like unto the Lord himself. Struggle, therefore, earnestly against all sin ; suffer not willingly its least remainder : it is our privilege to live without it ; let us never fall below our right, but “ press towards the mark, ” that we may “ perfect holiness in the fear of God. ”

SERMON II,
THE PENAL CONSEQUENCE
OF SIN.

SERMON II.

“ Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

Luke, xv. 31, 32.

THE caution of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian Christians, “ that they should not receive the grace of God in vain,” led, upon a former occasion, to the consideration of the fearful consequences of transgression in Christian men; of that cleaving moral taint which remains even in those cases (few, out of many) where the sinner is recovered from the snare of Satan; a taint which weakens the soul in its new efforts after holiness, and clinging to it always long, sometimes even to the end, prevents its full growth in purity and peace. This is that consequence of moral evil, which, in God’s ordinary dealings with

30 THE PENAL CONSEQUENCE OF SIN.

His people, is not at once remitted on repentance, and which remains as a bitter and enduring warning to them, that they should not tamper with iniquity, nor stain the brightness of their Christian garment by permitted sin.

But, besides this effect of wilful transgression, which is wrought within ourselves upon our moral being, there is another, every where declared in holy Scripture:—an effect, that is to say, upon the relation in which we stand to God ; upon our state, as well as upon our nature. The baptised infant and the faithful Christian are, we know, in very truth accepted of God in Christ ; his anger is turned away from them, and He is at peace with them. This state of peaceful acceptance we know, too, is wholly inconsistent with a course of indulged sin, which must suspend, and, for the time, do away to us as individuals the blessing of pardon and acceptance. But is it lost for ever ? There is no second baptism ; no new laver, whose waters can be sanctified to the mystical washing

away of sin. But is there for the sinner no assurance of forgiveness? Is he to go heavily, doubting long whether his repentance, though sincere, may be received; and, at the best, to have a trembling hope that he may at last be pardoned; whilst, in the mean time, he waits upon a God who hideth away his face, or reveals it rather as a severe exactor of deserved punishment, than as a Father waiting to be gracious? Or, on the other hand, is there to the baptised Christian who hath fallen from God, and wandered into the evil ways of allowed sin, is there still for him, upon his turning unto the Lord, a full and free and ready pardon, even as before his baptism? is there, *from* his baptism, that assurance of a Father's waiting favour? is there still, in the blood of Christ, which by his sin he has trodden under foot, a cleansing virtue for him; so that, whensoever he does turn in truth, he may take to himself surely all the promises of God, and look up again, without doubting or distrust, to the loving countenance of his heavenly Father?

It is of peculiar moment that the answer to this question should be clear: both because it lies so near to the very foundation of Christ's Gospel, that the personal hope of numbers every where must depend upon it; and because it will greatly influence the whole tone in which they to whom "the ministry of reconciliation" is committed must address themselves to men. Now, the parable of the prodigal son seems expressly constructed by our Lord to be a standing reply to this question in all ages of the Church. The only other explanation which it can receive, namely, that it was designed to shadow out the election of the Gentile Church, will by no means satisfy the occasion or construction of the parable: it may, indeed, bear this application; and its being found amongst the writings of St. Luke, rather than in any other gospel, seems to shew that it was so applied by the disciples. But this is the very character of all the words of Jesus; springing from some passing incident, and spoken to suit some present case, yet so instinct with life, so full

of hidden meaning, that they contain enduring instruction for the Church, which shall come out from them according to her need, in ways and at seasons which were as yet unknown to those who heard, or those who recorded them. A passing examination of the parable will best shew how far every other exposition will fall short of its requirements; and how fully all its secret meaning is brought out, when it is viewed as a sketch of the full and free restoration of the fallen Christian to the peace and safety of an accepted son of the Most High.

And, first, for the occasion on which it was spoken: "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him: and the Pharisees and Scribes murmured." Now it will perhaps at once strike any attentive reader of the Gospels, that the tone in which our Lord replies to these murmurs is very different from the severe denunciations and reproofs with which he commonly addressed those hypocritical and self-deceiving men. He proceeds to explain his conduct in the tone in

which he always spoke to a humble, puzzled faith, rather than in those words of wrath and fire with which he rebuked the proud and captious caviller. And the reason of this difference may assuredly be found in this ; that, though the murmurs of the Pharisees gave occasion to the parable, it was not so much addressed to them as to his own disciples, whose minds had been distressed by the suggestions of these murmurers. It *was* a strange and startling sight, to see the teacher of a purer faith, the reprover of the secret evils of the sanctimonious Scribes, thronged and surrounded by the most abandoned of their nation. The minds of the faithful few would be naturally startled by it. Thoughts were rising in their hearts, which He, who saw their hearts, graciously vouchsafed at once to still. And it is the more needful to notice this, because it has an important bearing upon the conclusion of the parable. The question, then, which our Lord meant to answer, was, why he permitted the approach of these lost and outcast Jews ;

for such were the publicans, though classed with heathen men, yet Jews and members of the covenant; and thence so peculiarly odious to their nation, as the deputies and instruments of the farmers of the Roman revenue. The murmur of the Pharisees was not that Gentiles thronged the Saviour; but that they gathered round him whose sins had made them as heathens in the sight of faithful Jews. To such He preached, and not to the Gentiles; for "He was not sent, save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." To meet, then, this difficulty, He frames a parable, which, in its strictest sense, can reach those only who have fallen from a covenant-relation with their God. The two sons, who dwelt together in their father's house, who with the first springing of the feelings, and the first dawnings of the reason, had felt and known around them a father's love and kindness;—this can properly and fully picture those only who have received in infancy the great gift of adoption, and have grown up, even from the dawnings of their reason, within the fold

of God. And so the parable proceeds. The subsequent separation of the sons speaks in the same language as their former union: the one left that which the other still retained; the one fell from grace given, the other still walked, in the main, in God's way; the one deeply stained his robe of sonship, by an open wandering from his Father's house and a course of repeated sins; the other kept the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless of such great transgression.

Mark here, for an instant, in the history of this sad fall, the rich incidental teaching of the word of God. The younger son gathered all together, and in the far country wasted his substance in riotous living. Now does not this suggest the age, and the circumstances, and the temptations most conversant with such deep falls? does not it hint to us the peril men are in during the first burst of their untutored passions; and that of those who leave their father's house, numbers are led from it in the hot blood of youth, by the mad baits of revelry and sensual pleasure?

But to return : every feature of the advancing parable is cast in the same mould. The mighty famine which surprises the reveller, at once dissolves the enchantment under the influence of which he had despised the peaceful and quiet joys of his father's house, and wandered madly forth to seek his pleasure amongst strangers ; and the first thoughts of his sobered and miserable estate are remembrances and longings turned towards the home which he had lost. And surely, even this figure, powerful as it is, is but a faint shadowing out of the bitter awakening of the deluded slave of sin and evil pleasure ; of the gnawing sense of emptiness ; of the restless craving after something real, and pleasureable, and true, which, sooner or later, must overtake all who have " counted themselves unworthy " of the heavenly gift, and turned from the satisfying portion of the children of God, to follow the empty and delusive sorceries of the father of lies.

But as our Lord is here picturing the course of one amongst those few that

escape, not of the many "dead that are there" (Prov. ix. 18), he goes on to describe the prodigal's return; and all still speaks it the description of the recovery of a fallen son of the Most High. The first longings after his father's home shew how truly he had dwelt in it, and how far he had wandered from it. The first resolution, "I will return unto my father's house, whence I came out," speaks of restoration to a state once enjoyed, and lost; not of a first receiving of the covenant-blessing. And how was this rising thought of penitence received? was it chilled by a cold delay of pardon? was he left to trace his trembling and doubtful steps to the home he had so wantonly abandoned, with no cheering intimation of the reception he should meet with there? and when he reached it, did he wait in the vestibule, and take his place amongst the servants? or, after a long penitence, and years of doubt, and full proof of amendment, at last, and hardly, receive one cheering look from the countenance which he had loved of old? "When he was

yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." And it was proclaimed a gracious day, and the fatted calf was killed; and the ring of sure acceptance given to grace, and the best robe brought forth to cover, this returning prodigal. Words cannot surely be stronger, nor a figure more expressive. The eye of the heavenly Father rests upon the wanderer; a great way off He sees him; whilst his own heart, clouded over by his sin, and weaned from God by wilful transgression, though it begins to turn to Him with longing, yet dares not look up with confidence; whilst his highest hope is the room of meanest servitude, and his just judgment passed upon himself a perpetual exclusion: even then His thoughts and ways, whose thoughts and ways are not as ours, are "thoughts of peace," to "give" to the returning wanderer "an expected end." (Jer. xxix. 11.)

And even to the first acts of a sincere penitence, surely there are here promised

some gracious marks of acceptance, as what shall be given to the returning sinner. Baptised, indeed, he cannot be afresh : but does he lose by that? No, truly ; for if he were coming to baptism, seeking its first washing from his guilt, it would profit him nothing, unless he came in sincerity and faith. The seal of God, indeed, would be sure, but not for him : and now, if he comes in sincerity and faith, the seal is still sure, and is for him ; his baptism is on him, fresh as when its waters glistened upon his infant brow ; he is received into his Father's house ; and there the words of gracious promise, the blessed seals of holy eucharists, and the fresh-springing fountain of the Saviour's blood, these are sure and for him ; and they are meant to carry to his soul the same certain consolation which the holy waters of baptism would be the outward means of bringing, if he came as a catechumen, instead of coming as a penitent. Yea, and doubtless God does, of his mercy, put into these things a power and virtue, which can in truth re-assure the heart of

trembling penitence. The ring and the robe are not forgotten by the heavenly Father, when He receives His wanderers. "At the beginnings of religion," as our own Bishop Taylor most beautifully words it, "and at some other times irregularly, God complies with our infirmities, and encourages our duty with little overflowings of spiritual joy, and sensible pleasure and delicacies in prayer; so as we seem to feel some little beam of heaven, and great refreshments from the Spirit of consolation: yet this is not safe for us always to have." And do we not see, that these things are given graciously of God to the tender beginnings of a young penitence, that its weakness may be encouraged; that the trembling, timid eye of the returning sinner may be strengthened to look up, and to read the joyful message of his pardon?

And how exactly this accords with the remainder of the parable! They who suppose it to be directly spoken to the self-righteous Pharisees become here entangled with inextricable difficulties: for how can

the praise given to the elder son suit such a character? Where is his ready and habitual service; or where that higher and more constant favour, which is a better portion than the gracious mercies poured on the returning wanderer? So, too, in the other clause of the similitude: before the elder brother's offence can be made to suit the jealousy with which the Jews regarded the adoption of the Gentiles, a somewhat forced application is required; for the gathering of the Gentiles was not receiving back a wandering brother into a state of privilege higher than that offered to themselves; but the knitting into one new election with themselves those who had been always hitherto "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise." (Ephes. ii. 12.)

But none of these difficulties beset the plain application of the figure. The faithful disciples of Jesus, who watched anxiously all His doings, felt the force of the murmurs of the Pharisees, and had no answer for them. His honour and His holiness were

dear to them ; and they knew not how to meet the taunt, that “ He received sinners, and ate with them.” To this faithful but mistaken doubt His words were pointed : they reprovèd at once and commended ; they shewed that it was meet thus to welcome the returning penitent ; whilst yet they spoke of a still higher favour, as that which was the portion of those who did not thus transgress.

The difficulty of the elder son was not that of a captious or a cavilling spirit. His conscience testified to him truly, that he had long been living in his father’s service : he now was grieved, and even wroth, but it was through a zeal for his father’s honour ; and so the answer allowed his claim of service, “ Son, thou art ever with me ;” whilst it justified the father’s doings, by declaring that these sudden marks of joy were proofs, not that his wandering brother was better than himself, but that he *had been* worse ; that while they were the assurances of present favour, they were, too, the very tokens of past unworthiness, and far below

that full, peaceful, and habitual portion which was his who had not thus offended: like the first joy which waits on ease from bodily distress, full of more sensible pleasure, yet far inferior in its worth to vigorous, established health. The timid and unsettled mind of the unhappy wanderer needed these outward marks, to re-assure his doubting spirit; but the faithful son can rest with a humble, quiet confidence upon his father's love: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." "All that I have is thine."

And there is here a lasting lesson for the Church of Christ. This difficulty, which beset the minds of the disciples, is one which has ever lingered in the Church, ready to perplex some faithful souls, wherever a far wanderer has been brought with singing back into her bosom. Many pages of her history warn us of this tendency to make the way of return narrower than Christ has left it; of an inclination to reprove with harshness those sensible marks of joy and favour with which the threshold is crowned for the penitent; of a Novatian,

readiness to diet the returning sinner long on doubts and fears, rather than to fling wide the doors, and kill the fatted calf, and welcome back to peace, and with rejoicing, the weary and heavy-laden wanderer. And this, let it be observed, not from self-righteousness, nor by the Pharisees alone; but from a zeal for holiness; and by the more consistent saint, from a jealous regard for God's honour; mistaken, indeed, in its application, and full of evil for the Church where it prevails, but still to be treated with respectful mildness, even when it is resisted the most firmly: following in that very note which was here set us by the Lord himself; "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine: it was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." This difficulty, moreover, it is evident, will then be the most trying to the faithful, when, as now, the rule of discipline has been relaxed, and holy men not unnaturally fear that to dispense with openness the promises of free forgiveness,

would but encourage others to enter on the deadly trade of alternate sinnings and repentings. At such a time, then, the Church has need to guard especially against this error of the elder son, lest a blameably relaxed economy of discipline should lead her to a no less culpable restraint of doctrine.

Yet it may perhaps be objected, that to make this full and free declaration of God's ready mercy to those who have offended grossly, after the sealed pardon and the living grace have been applied to them in holy baptism, is to contradict the practice of the earlier and purer ages of the Church; the expressed longing of our own commination-service for the restoration of such discipline; and the consenting voice of all antiquity. This were indeed a heavy charge; and it deserves therefore some consideration here. To enter clearly into it, a brief inquiry will be needful into the nature and intention of that ancient discipline, which seems, in some degree, to limit the full flow of mercy to the penitent; and this inquiry will, at the same time, throw much

light upon that language of antiquity, which appears, it may be granted, at first sight, to speak in another tone from that which has been given to this parable.

This discipline, then, of which our prayer-book speaks with longing, as the possession of a purer age, was wielded with a two-fold aim; to awaken, by the censures of the Church, to true repentance, those who slept in sin, "that their souls might be saved in the day of the Lord:" and, secondly, to admonish others by their example, and to make them afraid to offend. It was, that is to say, sanatory, for the profit of the careless sinner; and penal, for the profit of the Church. With the first of these we are not now concerned: it was a discipline for the impenitent, to awaken them by Church-censure unto repentance; and can therefore be no guide at all to us, as to our mode of addressing those who, without such censures, have been stirred up by the grace of God to the beginnings of a penitential sorrow. Our business is with the second; for this did directly concern the treatment of

the penitent offender. He was commonly, we learn, in the first ages, admitted "to one repentance and no more," if he fell, after baptism, into great and deadly sin. After this, he was kept sometimes for a space of years, sometimes till the hour of death, sometimes altogether, from the absolution and communion of the Church.* But why was he so banished? and how was he addressed? Not because Christ would not receive at once even such returning penitents; but because the Church judged it needful for the purity of her communion, in that age especially of pressing trial, and that sinners might not learn to trifle with her offices, to be thus rigorous and strict in the employment of her discipline. For even at this time she told the penitent, whom in her zeal to keep it pure, she thus thrust from her communion, that he might seek and look for, at the hands of God, that

* Clem. Alexand. Strom. ii. cap. 13. p. 459. edit. Oxon.—Tertul. de Pœnit. cap. 7: "Collocavit in vestibulo pœnitentiam secundam," &c.—Orig. Hom. 15. in Lev. tom. i. p. 174.

mercy, of which the outward signs and tokens could not here be granted him. And this we take to be the explanation of that language, which would seem, otherwise, to contradict the plainest invitations of God's word. It was the language of a Church administering discipline, declaring the economy of that discipline, and shewing what its limits were: it was no hint to those who were readmitted to communion, that they must doubt about the mercy of their God. How, indeed, if it were so, could St. Cyprian say, "That when we drink the blood of the Lord and the cup of salvation, we put off the remembrance of the old man; and our sorrowful and heavy heart, which before was pressed with the anguish of our sins, is now absolved and set at liberty by the joyfulness of the Divine pardon?"* She claimed the power to straiten or relax the full severity of these her rules; thereby marking that she was acting with a view to what was most expedient for herself, and not because the

* Cypr. Ep. 63. ad Cæcil. p. 153. Oxon edit.

revealed will of Christ compelled her to this harshness of demeanour with her wandering children. And how otherwise could we interpret, without contradiction, that rich under-song of free encouragement which mingles throughout the ancient writers with these severer tones? How could Gregory Nazianzen reason with Novatian*—"Dost not thou admit of penitence? wilt not thou weep tear for tear? mayest thou never meet with such a judge! Art not thou moved with the pitifulness of Jesus, who took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses; who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; who willeth mercy, rather than sacrifice, who pardoneth seventy times seven?" And how else can we understand the words with which, as we are told, St. Chrysostom was wont, in preaching, to encourage penitents,† that "a thousand times, if occasion should require, they

* Orat. xxxix. p. 635; quoted by Suicer under *μετάνοια*.

† Socrates, lib. vi. cap. 21; quoted by Bingham, Antiq. lib. xviii. cap. iv. § 7.

should be admitted to repentance and received into communion?" Or, again, where St. Augustine teaches us that "God has allowed three ways to obtain remission of sin. 1. Baptism which cleanses us from all manner of sins, original and actual, great and small. 2. Prayer and daily address to the throne of grace for sins of daily incur-sion, without which no man lives. 3. And for greater and more heinous sins he has allowed of a more solemn and particular repentance; and that either public, in case of scandalous and public crimes, or else private, between God and ourselves. So that a sinner need not complain of God for want of mercy, since there are so many ways of dispensing pardon to us after baptism."*

What, then, is the fitting inference to

* Aug. de Symbolo ad Catechumenos, lib. i. cap. 7. tom. 9, p. 294. "Propter omnia peccata baptismus inventus est; propter levia, sine quibus esse non possumus, oratio inventa. . . . Ergo tribus modis dimittuntur peccata in ecclesiâ; in baptismo, in oratione, in humilitate (majore) majoris pœnitentiæ."

be deduced from their severer language, which would seem, at times, almost to restrain the mercy of the Saviour? We may learn to lament, with our own Church, that the rule of wholesome discipline is entirely thrown aside; but surely it can give us no warrant to find a wholly different guard for holy practice, in limiting the mercy of our Lord. Because the early Church refused to re-admit offenders into her communion, yet bidding them hope in the Lord, whose mercy was not narrowed in and limited by such necessities as had restrained her own, surely we may not admit freely to communion the returning penitent, and then bid him doubt the goodness of the Lord of mercy. This were rather, with Novatian, to drive our sinful but repentant brother to despair; than, with St. Paul, to forgive and comfort him, "lest he be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow."

The full force, then, of this parable, and of many other such-like passages of holy Scripture, is not to be turned aside, as if they belonged not to us: and while we

have such gracious promises given to us freely to dispense, we need not fear or hesitate to speak to sinners of the mercy of the Lord. We need not deem of Christian baptism as such a doubtful and deadly blessing that it can dry up, even for the greatest of transgressors, the fresh and healing streams of a ready and assured pardon. Certainly they have not learned so to speak who, if any, were thoroughly imbued with the learning of antiquity. Hear the words of Bishop Taylor: "It is an uneasy pusillanimity and fond suspicion of God's goodness, to fear that our repentance shall be rejected, even although we have committed the greatest or the most of evils. We cannot think or speak good things of God, if we entertain such evil suspicions of the mercies of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every man is a sinner: 'in many things we offend all;' and 'if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves;' and therefore either all must perish, or there is mercy for all; and so there is upon this very stock, because Christ died for sinners, and God hath com-

prehended all under sin, that he might have mercy upon all. It was concerning baptised Christians that St. John said, 'If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father; and he is the propitiation for our sins:' and concerning lapsed Christians St. Paul gave instruction, that 'if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering lest ye also be tempted.' If we can forgive one hundred thousand times, it is certain God will do so to us: He glories in the titles of mercy and forgiveness, and will not have his appellatives so limited and finite, as to expire in one act or in a seldom pardon. Man's condition were desperate, and like that of the fallen angels, if he could be admitted to no repentance after his infant baptism: and if he may be admitted to one, there is nothing in the covenant of the Gospel but he may also to a second, and so for ever, as long as he can repent and return, and live to God in a timely religion."*

Which last declaration of that holy bishop

* Holy Dying.

is worthy of all note ; for in it we are reminded that in our zeal for holiness, we may introduce such teaching as may sap the very root of that which we desire to make a flourish. We cannot, indeed, alter or diminish any word which God hath revealed of himself, without injuring the cause of holiness ; though this consequence is not at all times to be seen beforehand with the same distinctness : but in this case it is surely plain. They who would blot out, or only cloud over, the fair face of mercy to the guilty, surely thereby bring on equally the night of desperation—that deadliest and most hopeless state of sin. For who has dealt with sinners, or who has searched deeply into the evils of his own heart, without finding that a lurking doubt and distrust of God’s readiness to pardon mingles ever with a state of sin ; and that when we hold up before men’s eyes the blessings and the peace of holiness, this misgiving mainly freezes up the streams of penitence ? There is no such rest and sweetness in iniquity, but that, when the first fever-fit is passed, men, unless they be

reprobates, loathe secretly its ways; the dregs of its cup of pleasure are always bitter; but they are entangled, and they see not now a sure escape; and therefore they hold on in its accursed paths, driven forward trembling often and reluctant; and then, again, grasping in their madness' at the painted fruits of bitterness which hang around them. And so they go on unto destruction.

And therefore it is that they need to hear of God's free mercy for repenting sinners; therefore is this the golden key to which alone the hardened heart will open; therefore is it that souls long dead to all the threatenings of the law have turned like "the rivers of the south" at the sweet sound of a Saviour's name: "There is forgiveness with thee, therefore thou mayest be feared." And in one important view, our very lack of discipline makes it the more needful that we put forward freely this most wholesome doctrine; for in proportion as men are left to themselves to manage the particulars of their spiritual recovery, they will be in danger of despairing, if it be sup-

pressed. The great transgressor, who took of old his settled place amongst the weeping penitents, had in that very care of the Church for his recovery an assurance of his ultimate escape. All her penitential discipline spoke to him of future hope ; of an appointed end ; of mercy in store, though not in hand ; and so forbade his giving up the strife, because he was not himself given up. But he that is left to a solitary striving with the evil one, whose own heart is the only witness of his guilt and his misery ; he, unless he be upheld continually by the sweet cordial of promises and the rich messages of mercy, is in great peril from the spirit of desperation.

And whom does this not concern? Surely there is not one who needeth not "to consider himself, lest he also be tempted." Or who, again, shall measure out so nicely all the proportions of his sin, that he can say whether he is or is not shut out, if any be, from the assurance of a present pardon? Where are the nice balances that shall so weigh all the circumstances of temptation,

and all the grains of guilt, that he shall know whether his be, in the sight of God, a wilful sin, or the incursion of a pardonable frailty? Who, save the Judge of all men, can graduate and measure out the nice degrees of guilt? Who, for example, is there, that can strike the balance between lukewarmness of affection or a stunted charity, amidst all the sheltering opportunities of a religious life, and a greater and more scandalous offence in one who, without such assistances, is forced to dwell in the near neighbourhood of some great temptation? No doubt, with man this is impossible; and so it happens, that their self-culture will be the most productive of good fruit, who, together with their burning zeal for holiness, hold the most firmly, and apply to themselves most constantly, this blessed persuasion of the Saviour's readiness to pardon. For their humility is kept most fresh who need not to extenuate their least offences: their faith in God, and hope of heaven, and charity to others is the most lively, who dwell in the continual sight of a great debt

forgiven them; the springs of a perpetual contrition water them the most; and, like a tree planted by the streams in a goodly soil beneath a favouring sky, they shoot out their branches the most freely, until they be well grown and ripened in the due proportions of each Christian grace. For, in declaring to the penitent the blessed promises of Christ's most gracious Gospel; in bidding him to go back again to his baptismal covenant; in telling him to take, with thankfulness and nothing doubting, the seal of pardon in the eucharist, we do not lead him to forget his sins, or think lightly of their bitterness. What healing power was lacking in the tears of the returning prodigal? what lost they, in their depth or bitterness, by falling on the neck of a still-gracious father? This, surely, is "to remember, and be ashamed, and never open the mouth any more," because of past iniquities, even when the Lord "is pacified towards us."

God forbid that we should teach men to make light of sin, or put it out of their remembrance as a thing forgotten. No; let

them remember it, even when the Gospel bids them hope that it is forgotten by the Lord. Let them weep for it afresh, as they see more of its defilement, and "go softly all their days." It is the very glory of Christ's Gospel, that it can combine a thankful assurance of pardon with the deepest sense of undeserving.

Nor, in good truth, need we fear that we shall thus encourage men in sin. Have we not other and safer guards, wherewith to hedge up the evil paths? May we not tell the tempted, of that empty and craving famine of the soul which must overtake the wilful sinner in the far land of his own guilty choosing? Have we not to tell them of the cleaving consequences of moral pollution; of the fiery darts of haunting doubt; of the weary buffetings with sinful thoughts; of the wasting sense of unreality in things unseen, which wait surely upon a late repentance? Is there not a guard against offending in the painfulness of a slow recovery; in the harassing danger of a relapse; in the smaller power of standing, and the greater weight of

temptation; in the lower measure of recovered holiness; in the shame which dwells about the very tokens of forgiveness? Above all, have we not this guard, that without repentance there can be no escape; and that repentance is not in man's hands? that the opportunity may not be given, or that the grace may be withheld; that the free Spirit of God may be quenched; that no one can forecast the consequence of any sin; and that while, therefore, for the penitent, there is forgiveness in the blood of Christ for the multitude of his transgressions, there may be, for him who chooses evil, damnation in one sin?

SERMON III.

THE TEMPER OF MIND IN WHICH TO
RECEIVE THE CHRISTIAN
MYSTERIES.

SERMON III.

“ And He said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” Exodus, iii. 5.

IT has ever been a part of the Church's wisdom to inculcate the holy mysteries of our faith by associating their remembrance with the observance of certain festal days; and thus winning for them an entrance through the affections, where the dulness of the understanding, or the want of learning, made men almost inaccessible to other instruction. And in this she follows closely the example set before her in God's holy word; where the great mysteries of Christ's religion are never laid before us in the naked precision of dogmatical and systematic statements; but rather steal upon us amidst the dews of its other gracious influences; wrapped up in parables; entwined with the various actions

and events of the holy life of Jesus ; dropped in the pregnant words of teaching which were called from him by some passing occasion ; or, at the clearest, hinted as admitted principles in the apostolical epistles. And thus, at this season of the year, after tracing, in the grateful recollection of her feast-days, the life of Christ from Bethlehem to Calvary ; and on each enforcing those great truths with which the facts she celebrates are gemmed ; and then, after waiting with the orphan Church for the great gifts of Pentecost, she leads us on this day to celebrate with reverend thankfulness the highest of her mysteries, whilst with adoring hearts we bow ourselves before the Triune Jehovah. It will, then, be strictly in the spirit of this day's services to inquire with some little particularity into the temper of mind in which the consideration of such high truths should be approached, as well as the most natural means of acquiring and preserving it.

On the very threshold of such an inquiry, we are met by the caution which

checked the curiosity of Moses. The vision of the Angel of the Lord in the bush burning but unconsumed, stirred up within his heart the desire of searching further into the wonder which had startled him: "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned" (v. 3). So ever speaks with its first impulse the curiosity of man; which would subject the wonders of the nature and the presence of his God to that scrutiny of the intellectual powers by which he is accustomed to examine the creation round him. But this purpose is at once interrupted, and the announcement of God's presence is followed by the caution, "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (v. 5); teaching him, that reverence and adoration, rather than the sharpness of observing scrutiny, were the attributes with which it became the creature to enter his Creator's presence.

Here, then, is an intimation, that clearness of intellect is not that upon which

mainly depends the right perception of God's revelation of himself.

And this same truth we shall find repeatedly recurring in the sacred pages. To pass at once to the Christian revelation and the teaching of our Lord, how manifestly is the same lesson to be found in His declaration, that "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, he shall not enter therein!" (Luke, xviii. 17). With all those faculties for comprehension which depend upon the perfection of the intellectual powers, a little child is evidently unsupplied. What, therefore, can prove more clearly than such a declaration, that moral fitness, rather than subtilty of intellect, is needed for receiving rightly this revelation of Himself.

This, indeed, is but what we might reasonably expect; for as the Christian revelation, by its own profession, is not a mere intellectual abstraction, but in its nature and foundations is essentially moral, the evidence on which it rests cannot, as in abstract science, be addressed purely to the

intellect. To receive it rightly, the will must assent to it no less than the understanding. By no other solution can we account for the wholly opposite conclusions, even upon fundamental points, at which we see men of the highest reasoning powers arrive. For as, in all matters of necessary truth, right reasoning from the same premises must lead to the same conclusions; and as we see men, whose powers of reasoning are above all question, come here to opposite conclusions; we must suppose, either that something more than intellectual power is needful to lead them right, or that there is in this subject-matter no such thing as abstract truth, but that to every separate mind that which seems so to itself is true. But as this supposition is destructive of the very notion of revelation, which requires that the doctrines it teaches should be received as facts, true in themselves, independently of all opinions, it only remains, that men's various conclusions must be the result of some moral causes separate from their mere intellectual powers.

And if from this general view of the discrepancies of belief, we turn to the examination of a single instance, we shall find new light thrown upon the subject.

No one, perhaps, has thought at all steadily of any of these mysteries of revelation, without being, in some measure, troubled by the manifest difficulties with which they are beset. Sometimes it is directly in the very article of belief; and 'How can it be?' is the spontaneous language of the mind; that is, the difficulty of the subject suggests to us a temptation to deem it impossible. At another time the temptation takes another shape. The words we have been taught to use, and to which our lips and ears have long grown familiar, sound new and strange to us: we doubt whether we have not used them always hitherto idly, and without attaching any meaning to them; that is, we are tempted to deem of religious truth as an unreality: we can scarcely persuade ourselves that it has ever been to us more than a sound of words; and then the air of un-

reality soon creeps over the whole. Or, again, perhaps the temptation has arisen from what seem to us to be the necessary consequences of that which we are called on to believe : some train of thought leads us on, before we are aware, to something which follows from it, and which is in itself evidently absurd, or irreverent, or, in some way, unbecoming the dignity of heavenly truth ; that is, we are here tempted to speculate and rationalise on that which belongs to the province of faith, rather than the reasoning faculty. Now, to one who has cultivated with any care an habitual reverence for holy things, the very glancing of such thoughts over the mind gives deep and instant pain : an overpowering sense of its own weakness accompanies their entrance ; a doubtfulness about all its conclusions ; an almost instinctive dread of whither it may be led on ; a sense of the letting go of the only anchor of the mind, and of a floating off upon the restless ocean of uncertainty and doubt : the feelings and the reason seem at war, and the mind is very much

in the condition of an ingenuous child, who has been puzzled and distressed by the results of some reasoning to which it knows of no reply, and yet against which its filial reverence instinctively rebels. And if, at this moment, this pain, which is indeed an intimation of the will of God, be duly attended to, the immediate impulse of the heart is to cry out to Him for help; to cast itself upon its habitual persuasion of the love and power of God, as on realities of which, without reasoning, it is convinced by the very necessity of its own nature; and in the darkness of its confused searchings after truth, to say, "that I know not, teach Thou me:" and then the next step is to practise what it does know, acting on the promise, "If any man will do My will, he shall know of the doctrine." And then the effect of this conduct must evidently be to form a habit of shrinking from doubt and speculation; and in the same degree to nourish and increase a reverent and affectionate belief in what is revealed: and this not from the power or subtilty of the intellect,

but from the moral qualifications of the soul for receiving God's revelation of himself.

But now take the opposite case; that of one who had not been so carefully shielded from irreverence of thought; who had been accustomed to think and to speak of holy things with levity, or even to suppose them to be fit subjects for the exercise of great intellectual subtilty, and for our natural powers of argument and discovery. The entrance of sceptical or irreverent thoughts could clearly give no instant pain to one who belonged to the first of these two classes; because his mind has become accustomed to the sight of holy things mixed up with low and unworthy thoughts, and there is nothing, therefore, to shock him in such an association: moral evil, that is to say, has robbed him of the first safeguard of his faith, and made him less fit for receiving the discovery of heavenly mysteries. And so too in the second case: when doubts or difficulties cross this man's mind, instead of crying out to God for light, in the darkness which is beginning to oversha-

dow his soul, he at once sets his own intellect to work: no humbling sense of its miserable weakness drives him instinctively to seek a better strength: in vain is there a Father's hand stretched out to succour him: self-confidence knows not that its steps are stumbling. "Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life." He begins, therefore, to reason; and in so doing, he unawares encourages his danger: his temptation, in truth, is to speculate, where he ought to believe; and, in his ignorance, he sets himself to speculation, in order that he may believe more rightly: he becomes, therefore, of course, bolder and bolder in speculation; the motes multiply before his eyes, and cloud over more and more the obscured vision of God's truth. While he thinks, perhaps, that he is loving truth above all things, and seeking for it most eagerly, he is, in fact, loving his own delusions; a passion for speculation and argument is leading him captive where it will: he thinks that he is sacrificing all for the faith; he is, indeed, sacrificing all for his

own besetting sin: and so the hardened heretic, cast out of the communion of the Church, and giving up, it may be, worldly advancement, because he will adhere to his own speculations, though he appears a much more interesting object, because he seems in one light to be suffering for his love of truth, is, indeed, making the very same sacrifice, on the very same ground, as he who, for the grosser baits of animal indulgence, brings upon himself the same sufferings: he is, in truth, sacrificing all at the shrine of his besetting sin; a sin too, which, though decked out with the seeming glory of a spurious martyrdom, is, when we look more closely, an exact copy of that which we may reasonably class as the greatest of offences, "the very snare of Satan;" for it is an instance of a reasonable creature falling from his God, not by fleshly temptation, but by intellectual and spiritual revolt.

Here, then, as before, we are brought to the conclusion, that the right perception of God's revelation of himself, depends

more upon the heart than upon the understanding, and that to err here in fundamental matters is a moral rather than an intellectual failing; that a pure and teachable spirit is the main distinction of that temper in which we should approach the mysteries of the Christian revelation.

From this, then, it follows, first, that man is responsible for his belief;—responsible, that is, just as he is for any other branch of moral conduct: that it is, indeed, a part of his trial, and a great one, whether he will believe: that, as a right belief is the only source and spring of moral purity, so a wrong belief, where a true revelation is offered to us, is the undoubted fruit of moral evil: and hence, that as in all other parts of his probation, it is out of the power of *fallen* man by his own might and strength to do that which is right, so especially is it out of his power to believe; but that, as in all other parts of his probation, so too in this, obedience is within the power of *redeemed* man, through that blessed help of God's most Holy Spirit

which will not be withheld from those who seek for it. Upon those secret springs of the will, which must co-operate with and quicken intellectual credence into saving faith, is doubtless the first work of that preventing Spirit which was given to us at holy baptism: from that Spirit were all the better thoughts and wishes of childhood and of youth; from it all those yearnings after God, which, at some time or other of their lives, all who watch themselves may trace, by which He would draw our spirits to Himself: and with this help within our reach, we are most properly responsible for our belief; not, indeed, as if by a single act of the volition we could make ourselves believe; but as those who may live in such an habitual state as will lead assuredly to their believing or rejecting the revelation of the Lord. Our blessed Saviour's words are most express upon this point: "He that is of the truth heareth my words." "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh of God only?" (John, v. 44.)

What words could lay down more plainly the existence of a necessary connexion between the moral habits of the soul and the reception of HIS heavenly teaching?

And this leads us on to the second part of our inquiry; for to be thoroughly convinced of the certainty of this connexion, is one of the first means of maintaining a fit temper for receiving these great mysteries. So long as we in any degree deem of them as of subjects into which we are to obtain a peculiar insight by our own reasonings, we shall find it impossible to repress that pride of intellect, which, whilst it flatters us with apparent discoveries, does, in fact, most effectually shut out the light of truth. We must be content to be learners, not discoverers, in the school of faith; receiving a revelation, not reasoning out conclusions: and this temper we cannot maintain, unless we come into God's presence remembering that, so far only as He gives us to know Him can we know aright; for that we need perfect purity to see Him as He is, and that we are compassed about with infirmity. Then only

when the thought of His holiness and of our corruption bows us to the earth, shall we receive His teaching with the simplicity of children; fixing on the ground those eyes which were ready to gaze too rashly at the wonders of His presence, and be ready, indeed, to “put off our shoes from our feet,” feeling that “the place whereon we stand is holy ground.”

To this conviction, moreover, we should join a constant watchfulness, lest allowed sin in any form, lest boldness of spirit, or slothfulness in our use of holy things, impair the reverence of our souls. Here the least checks of conscience, and the lightest intimations of the Spirit of God, must be watched for carefully, and diligently used: and to quicken our vigilance, let us bear in mind, if we have never been visited with doubts, that for this we owe great gratitude to God. Have we deserved to be thus exempted from them? or rather, have we not; at one time by carelessness and indolence of spirit, and at another by the rudenesses of an unsanctified boldness, invited their

approach? What thanks, then, do not we owe to Him who knoweth our feebleness, and has spared us, of His mercy, so exceeding hard a trial!

But if we have been, in any measure, tried by them, there is only the more need of our using with greater diligence the self-same means. The presence of doubts is not, indeed, always in itself a proof of any irreverence of soul: sometimes they are permitted to harass the faithful man as a trial of his faith; and when they come thus, and not as the fruits of irreverence or negligence, it is often against the most valuable minds that they are aimed. The armory of Satan is rifled to furnish weapons of offence wherewith to injure those who are proof against his commoner assaults. From this danger no one is absolutely safe. There seems clearly to be an intimation in the Gospel, that our blessed Lord himself, when He bore our feeble humanity, was tempted by the suggestion of doubts from the enemy without, though no possible taint of evil, either from the imagination, understanding, or will, ever

visited His soul; for to Him it was whispered from without, "IF Thou be the Son of God," to insinuate, if it were possible, into that most true-loyal soul some mistrusting doubtfulness of His Almighty Father. The suggestion, therefore, of doubts to the mind, does not necessarily suppose the presence of sin; it does unquestionably suppose the presence of danger, and therefore is a call for greater watchfulness, for a more diligent guard over the first tendencies of thought towards irreverent speculation; that the fiery brands may be quenched or thrown back before they have kindled so much as a spark within. Whilst irreverence and doubt are the objects of your greatest fear; whilst you would gladly retain a child-like and unquestioning reverence, by abasing, if need were, your understanding, rather than gain any knowledge at the hazard of your reverence; you are doubtless in God's hand, and therefore safe. Yet, as He works by means, and as this danger evidently threatens you, guard against it with a vigilant providence; fly from doubts, rather

than enter into conflict with them, remembering that "he who will fight the devil at his own weapon must not wonder if he find him an overmatch."* Fly, therefore, rather than contend; fly to known truths; shelter yourselves, above all, under the shadow of His love and power, who is, in compassion, Father of your spirit, and yet is the Lord God Almighty: begin to act upon the truth you do know, and your darkness shall be turned into light. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God" (Isaiah, l. 10).

To these means must be added further, as perhaps the greatest instrument of all for preserving the unsullied clearness of a reverent faith, that we be deep and constant students of God's holy word. We know, indeed, and feel the blessing and advantage of symbols, formularies, and articles; of the whole amount of uninspired

* South.

transmitted teaching, with which God's providence has enriched His Church. We doubt not, that in the consent of Christendom we can read the working of God's Spirit on the souls of His children; even as we can trace the passage of the wind of heaven by the ruffling of the waters underneath its breath: and for these great helps towards the due comprehension of revealed truth we heartily thank God, using them carefully, and with reverence of spirit; not thanklessly and rudely throwing aside any help (least of all so great an one), where we are so weak, and where we so greatly need great strength. But still, with another spirit, and with far higher reverence, we turn to holy Scripture: here are no weary searchings of the soul, amidst the waywardness of individual fancy, for that track of consent, which, when close to us, shews often so faintly as to be almost lost, although on the whole the eye can run along its course; but all is sure. It is not grains and dust that we collect, golden indeed, and precious enough to repay the toil of wash-

ing, and sifting, and testing, and collecting, though still but grains and dust; it is rich and solid veins of ore, which grow under our hands. Now, the bearing of this difference on the formation of a reverential habit of receiving truth, is most direct. This unquestioning submission to a heavenly guide is the very temper which we need; and to no other teaching but that of inspiration can we thus absolutely yield up ourselves. Nowhere but where we know that every word is necessarily true, can we wholly abandon the spirit of questioning what we are taught, and with all our souls ask only what we are to learn. Nor need it be concealed, that this caution becomes only the more requisite at any time when the spirit of theological research has been happily aroused, and men have been sent from the slight and unsatisfying prettinesses of the moderns, to the more solid and severe thoughts of earlier times. The energy and wholesome zeal for learning, which then succeeds to the listlessness of a superficial season, leads men into new danger. Holy

Scripture they seem to know, because they are familiar with its words ; and it appears, therefore, as if other studies yielded more return to the inquirer. There is more to satisfy a restless curiosity ; there are more apparent, superficial gains ; and so there is great danger, lest, unawares, and whilst their language changes not, men's secret estimate of things should change ; lest, practically speaking, holy Scripture be less valued, in point of fact, its pages be less searched ; and man's authority and secondary fountains be mainly employed to quench that thirst of the spirit which should be slaked only at the living waters of God's word.

This is no slight danger ; great is the injury which may accrue from it to our belief. First, as you have seen, in its necessary effect upon our power of simply apprehending truth, without the presence of a questioning spirit ; but not this only,—it affects too our system of belief, as well as our powers of believing. We do not, indeed, as the Romanist declares, set men

down unaided to draw out from holy Scriptures for themselves a system of belief, although we may not doubt but that from them alone, if no more were given, men might learn aptly, by the secret teaching of the blessed Spirit, all truth needful for salvation : but more has been given ; and what God has given, we dare not to slight. Our creeds, and all the transmitted judgments of the Church, are most precious aids ; and, with the previous teaching of these stored in their minds, we send men to the Scriptures, not to discover, by a curious scrutiny or new inspiration, truths hitherto unknown, but that they may learn indeed, and with a spiritual knowledge, truths old to the Church, but, in this sort, new to them. We would impress upon you, that the teaching of articles and schemes of faith is, by the necessity of the case, dogmatical and cold—addressed to the understanding more than to the heart ; and that the belief which you will gain from learning Christianity from them is, therefore, wholly another thing from that which will possess their

souls who patiently and earnestly explore the word of God. No truth is written in broader characters in every page of past Church-history. Many are the heresies which have sprung from a learned pride; from ignorance alone scarcely perhaps a single one—none, certainly, from ignorant humility. The only theological knowledge which has saved men from heresy has been this knowledge of God's word. So, indeed, it must be; the sands of a faith adopted thus mainly by the intellect must be ever shifting; they want the compacting principle of moral obligation. It is when the objective truths which creeds and articles record in naked propositions become subjective in our minds, by being mixed up and united with the daily upgrowth of our moral being, that our souls are truly established in the Christian verities. Take, for example, the great mystery we this day celebrate. We learn in creeds to limit and mark out our faith in the holy Trinity; but be it never so right in its exactness, how different is such a faith from that which has grown into the very consti-

tution of our souls, when, prepared by this previous teaching, we have come long to the daily study of God's word ! for there we find these same great truths spread through all the length and breadth of its revelations, flashing out like heavenly light from every page, teaching us, in the sense of guilt, our need of an infinite Saviour ; in the sense of sin, our need of God's own Spirit dwelling in us ; and then shewing to us the Almighty Jehovah, before whose awful throne our souls bow overpowered, as a reconciled Father in Christ Jesus. For here the revelation of mysteries is mingled by God himself with all those appeals and applications which reach, and mould, and influence the moral faculties. All the elements which may be separately found in human teaching are harmonised and blended into the air of heaven. Its very difficulties, as St. Austin most wisely teaches us, are suited to our needs, and so framed as to sharpen our desires for truth, whilst they give to our faith the exercise and trial which it needs.* This is the treasure hidden in the

* *Obscurum aliquid est ; non ut tibi negetur, sed ut*

field; and cheap indeed would be its purchase, though a man should sell all other learning to buy it. But this is only to be gained from a patient and a humble study of God's word. A mere argumentative acquaintance with the various passages which seem to bear most directly upon controverted doctrines will be no substitute for such a knowledge: these will not breed within us, for example, that hearty faith in the Trinity, which grows up in the faithful man, as day by day his soul is taught more to rest, in times of darkness and distress, upon the blessed assurance that he is justified before a holy God by a living union with His own coequal Son; and as, in the weariness of his daily struggle with the remainders of corruption, he more and more brings out into reality and life the true presence in his heart of that Almighty Comforter who is working with and in him, and who will at last make him meet for the unclouded presence of the

exerceat accepturum . . . Voluit ut exerceris in pulsando; voluit ut pulsanti aperiret, &c.—AUG. in *Psal.* cxlvi. tom. iv. fol. 1644. ed. Benedict.

Holy One. This is a true faith in the Trinity; widely separate, on the one hand, from the unreality of the religion of the mystic, who, resolving all faith into its inner life, in his subtle search after the vital principle, leaves go his hold of those great external truths on which, as on the articulations of the frame, all the rest of religion must depend: and, on the other, not less diverse from that cold concinnity of intellectual adjustment which changes this great mystery from a living principle of godliness into a mere subtlety of dogmatic teaching.

Seek, we charge you, as you love your souls, thus to use that sacred deposit which on this day the Church brings out before your eyes: turn not from it idly, as from some ineffectual dogma of the schools; gaze not on it curiously, as on some fitting thesis for skilful argument; but receive it with earnest reverence; lay hold on it with your affections, as the very pith and kernel of that blessed revelation which from it unfolds itself in every part into a pervading principle of life, and peace, and joy.

And hence follows again, on a different ground, the same supreme importance of a constant study of God's word; for to no other teaching may we trust, to carry out into detail the dogmas of our faith. Nowhere else can we be absolutely safe from imbibing, with the truth, some erroneous leaven, which may work strangely and fearfully within us. To this danger we must be exposed, when we follow any uninspired expounder of doctrine: his virtues and his faults, his circumstances and those of the Church around him, the peculiar aspect of the truth for which he is compelled to strive, and the especial errors which he is obliged to combat,—all these, will, of necessity, impart a certain colour to the faith as he delivers it, and alter, in a certain measure, its effect upon him who receives it. Those only can we follow with absolute security who “know these things” as “freely given to them of God;” and who “speak” them “not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth” (1 Cor. ii. 12, 13). But even beyond this, great as it

is, without supposing any charm to lurk in the very letter of the Scripture, we may look for a peculiar blessing on its teaching. We need not fear, with our wisest divines of the seventeenth century, to speak of "the word as one of those arteries which convey the Spirit to us."*

Hence, therefore, in a two-fold way, does the faithful study of the Scripture, by increasing in us the gift of the Holy Ghost, secure our receiving rightly the mysteries of God: first, since it is the especial province of the Spirit to reveal these mysteries, those will the most surely grow in light who grow in grace; they who the most humbly seek His teaching will be the most surely led on into all truth. It is written in God's word, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (1 John, ii. 20). "The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you" (ver. 27). And there is in such words a deep and blessed truth, which must not be suppressed because it has

* Bishop Andrewes' Sermon I. on Pentecost.

been disfigured and debased by fanatical perversions. There is a "teaching of the Spirit;" we may, as children, give up ourselves to Him, and humbly trust He will enlighten us. And then, secondly, besides the increase of this direct teaching, we are thus made the fitter recipients of His instruction; for since, as we saw before, the due reception of these mysteries depends more on moral than on intellectual fitness, they who by a growth in grace are growing in holiness, are indeed taking the surest way to purge the eyes of their understanding, so that they may see without speck or dimness what the Lord has revealed of himself: "I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts" (Psalm cxix. 99, 100). And so it happens here, as every where besides, that for every sacrifice we make for God, he has provided an abundant recompence. We call on men, indeed, to mortify their thirst for knowledge; to abase their pride of reasoning; to become as little children: we meet

the young man glorying in his untamed powers of imagination, and we meet the wise man glorying in his patient strength and subtilty of reason; and we tell them, that they must be content to part with those most valued attributes, and receive Christ's teaching as a little child. And these are great requirements. But our rewards are not less than our demands. We can promise, in Christ's name, to those who will venture on His word, the secure possession of that which reason promises in vain. They who at His call are willing to choose the path of a humble ignorance, shall find it turn into the way of surest knowledge. Though they sacrifice some apparent boldness or subtilty of intellect, though they sparkle less with the outward dazzle of an assumed philosophy, yet even their natural capacities will be increased and perfected. The patience and docility which such self-discipline engenders; the quiet brightness of mind which follows the clearing off of the mists of disfiguring passions—these are great aids even to the natural faculties. The mind which has been most deeply steeped in the morning dews of

devotional exercises, will ever bear with the most maintained freshness the parching heats of deep and various study.

And if this be true as to objects of mere intellectual apprehension; if, with regard to them, the boldness of self-confidence, and the promises of an unpurged reason, are uncertain and deceitful, how abundantly more true is it, if we take into our reckoning the best and greatest objects which can occupy the human mind, and the widest and most lasting period for its active exercise! for these are closed for ever against all, save those who will enter on the search through the narrow portal of such a teachable submission.

Even here on earth, what are all the speculations of the reason, or the secrets of science, to that knowledge of the Creator of all things, which the humble and the contrite gain? Wise, indeed, even for this life, was the resolution—"Credo, ut intelligam." Faith demands the submission, but it insures the perfection of the reason; it has a peculiar insight granted it into the highest and the deepest things: "*Sæpe amor intrat, ubi*

cognitio foris stat.”* And if, from this world, where the mischance of a moment, the burning of a fever or the wasting of an ague, may rob us, unwarned, of all our most valued stores; if, from this short and uncertain condition, we carry on our reckoning into the eternal world, all comparison is at an end. “Blessed” then, indeed, “are the pure in heart; for they shall see God” (Matt. v. 8): words for which our poor conceptions here can furnish no fit interpretation; but which suggests to us, certainly, the highest satisfaction of our intellectual as of our moral faculties; the full fruition of those longings which God has planted in our nature, and which here below can never be completely met;—words which plainly teach us, that the meek docility and child-like purity which Christ requires in his disciples, will be, beyond all measure, overpaid, when, before the throne of light, “we shall see no more through a glass darkly, but face to face;” when “we shall no more know in part, but even as we are known” (1 Cor. xiii. 12).

* Gerson.

SERMON IV.

THE DANGER OF DEPRAVING THE
MORAL SENSE.

SERMON IV.

*“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil;
that put darkness for light, and light for darkness;
that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”*

Isaiah, v. 20.

THE prophet is bewailing, in this chapter, the general corruption of his nation, and the judgments which that corruption was fast bringing on it; “Therefore are my people gone into captivity because they have no knowledge:” and then, turning from the general doom of all, he pronounces a more emphatic censure upon those who had seduced them from their God; “Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-rope! Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”

The direct force, then, of this woe, is pointed against those who, by their princi-

ples or conduct, lower the moral and religious standard around them. There are many features of society peculiar to this place, which make this a most appropriate warning, and call, therefore, for your most serious attention to its meaning. The subject which it opens is two-fold, leading us, first, to note especially the guilt of thus inflicting injury on others; and then the self-accomplishment of this great woe upon those who act as the corruptors of their brethren.

Now a very little reflection may convince us how sore an evil is such conduct, and how great a condemnation it entails. For, first, the current conventional standard of society around them, is, alas! even in this Christian land, the main principle by which the great mass of the better sort of people regulate their conduct. For one who refers truly to the law of God, hundreds may be found who act upon the common maxims of society. In each profession, and in every rank of life, this is the common law of conduct. To obey this, no self-denial is too strict amongst the better sort of men; and

to go beyond this, is taken for a sign of eccentricity, if not of madness. The most scrupulous observance of the truth, for instance, is required within these limits, and the most unscrupulous untruth allowed immediately without them. So absolute indeed is this conventional morality, and so much are the habits of society at large, and the conduct of its individual members, formed upon it, that the sudden removal from the world of all the rules and sanctions of our holy faith, as of an exploded fable, would scarcely produce any instant effect upon society. For the time, and until the general standard had been lowered down, they would go on very much as they do now: the same restraints would check the same rebellious passions, and the same inducements call out the same amount of usual and expedient virtues. But thus it would be for a time only; for those upon whom personally our holy faith exerts no direct influence, are greatly affected by the higher general tone of morals it has introduced. But for the faith of Jesus, the actual standard, vicious as it is, would have been

infinitely lower; and that lower standard would be an incalculable curse. The higher standard is a continual preparation for something better; and the lower standard affords a constant readiness for greater abominations. If we could follow the inquiry into the detail of cases, we should see how many were prepared for great and hopeless depths of vice, by living where the common tone around them was brought very low; and, on the other hand, how those who by such secondary motives had been preserved from open iniquity, had been gradually led, of God's great goodness, to far better things by his preventing grace.

And all this applies, in no small measure, to those who do act in some degree upon true Christian motives, as well as to the world at large. We cannot but observe, how different in temper and degree is the religion of one age from that of another; and how, for good or for evil, its general standard may be altered by a few leading minds in any generation. And that which we thus see on a large scale in general society, may be easily

traced down to individual instances: one man, endued with no more than the cheap talent of personal popularity, will soon leaven those round him with his own vices, lower their perception of evil, accustom them to sin; and, acting through each one of them, as a centre, upon their own acquaintance and connexions, lower again, in a less degree, but still distinctly, their sense of evil: and so, whilst he seems to himself, at the worst, to be but seeking thoughtlessly for pleasure, whilst he is a cause of pleasure to all those around him, he is, in truth, doing Satan's work with all the faculties which God has given him, and bringing on his soul the awful woe denounced against the eminent corruptors of his people.

Nor is the converse of this picture less true. Nowhere does there rise up one eminent in holiness, an earnest follower of our adorable Redeemer, without the fruit of his secret prayers, and silent watchings, and earnest communion with God, being soon traced, not by an evident and noisy following, but by the secret, leaven-like working

of better principles, stealing, through God's gracious blessing, on the hearts of one and of another, and thus raising all around him the general standard of holiness and zeal.

This is true every where, but it is eminently true in society constituted as it is amongst us in this place. The tone of a college at any given time is set, to a remarkable degree, for good or evil, by a few decided characters, far more than by external rules or by internal discipline.

This, therefore, it becomes us especially to bear in mind : never can we live for ourselves alone ; but least of all can we do so, placed as we are here. An influence for good or for evil is daily going forth, from our tone in society, from our common words and actions, the effects of which no man can calculate. We are, whether we know it or not, leading others to assume a higher standard, by that we set before them ; or breaking down gradually the impressions which shield them from evil, and rendering them an easier prey to the great enemy of souls. Who shall reckon up the value of those common

opportunities in the midst of which we live? How many, whom on earth our eyes shall never see, may rise up at the great day, when all secrets shall be known, to call us blessed, for the incidental good which visited their souls, from our secret prayers, or open self-denial; or even from the copy of these graces transmitted through another from ourselves? Doubtless every golden link shall then be seen and numbered; and while all the glory of salvation is given to its Lord, they who have "turned many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever."

Nor is the counterpart of this picture less important: it is one of the most fearful characters of sin, that its consequences are wholly out of our control. No man can stay the stone which he has rashly set in motion; and he who has lowered the religious standard of another cannot undo his mischief. He may, of God's mercy, turn himself, and his sin may be forgiven; but still it may go on working death to others; and at the day of reckoning, surely, even to the ransomed

sinner, such a sight as then may be disclosed must be appalling to his soul!—others lost through him, though he himself is saved. Something of this bitterness was felt upon that noted death-bed where the reclaimed unbeliever felt that his own unfailing hope in a Redeemer's blood was saddened, on the brink of death, by the remembrance that his example and his writings were still enduring to ruin other souls. Then was written on his conscience, in all the living energy of realised conviction, that there must be an enduring woe for those who had taught others by their sins to "call evil good, and darkness light."

But another part of the woe here pronounced is perhaps still more important, and to that we shall do well to turn our thoughts. It is one especial part of their punishment who are thus engaged in lowering the moral standard of society around them, that they must be, in a still greater measure, injuring themselves: and here the mischief is certain. Their example may, by possibility, be almost inoperative upon others; they may,—though

this will seldom happen, but they may,—find none around them whose moral powers they can lower and debase: but *one* there must be—one living, reasoning, enduring being, whom every such offender must destroy; whose judgment of good and evil he cannot but debase; whom he must surely rob of this the best gift of his God,—and that one is *himself*; the true, the very man within. For how “shall a man touch pitch and not be defiled?” We have no other way, let us remember, of transmitting moral evil than by contagion: we must, in the first place, be ourselves the victims of that which we convey to others; and our own moral standard must first, and especially, be lowered by that evil which is seen in our example, and is lowering the standard of society around us.

This is a subject of such vast importance,—to those too, especially, who are first entering fully upon life,—that it well merits a more patient and particular examination.

There is then within each of us a power or faculty by which we judge of good or evil, and which we call conscience, or the

moral sense. This is evidently given to us by God, either as a part of the original composition of our souls, or as a fruit of his common and universal influence within the hearts of men: for we see it every where present in man, as far as observation can extend, in some form of action or other. It is, too, a faculty of internal judgment, which does not result from a process of reasoning, but acts with far greater rapidity and power: it pronounces at once its decision, acting most readily, perhaps, in the very beginning of life, when the reasoning powers have scarcely been developed. Nor can the reason *directly* affect its judgment. It is in vain that we strive to silence its voice by the cunning sophisms with which we too often endeavour to bribe its decision: it acts by a more direct and certain rule. And this power was intended, doubtless, by God, to be our great aid in resisting sin; to be the watchful guardian of the approach of evil; and, by the instant pain it can inflict, to oppose the immediate pleasure with which sin is ever baited.

Through it, too, the Holy Spirit of the Lord acts upon our souls, quickening their natural power, and by it speaking to us in the inner silence of our own hearts: and to those who yield themselves to its commands, when thus strengthened from above, it becomes an absolute control, and the promise is fulfilled—"Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isaiah, xxx. 21). For thus it is that life, and energy, and reality, are given to that teaching of revelation by which our reason is instructed; that which the reasoning faculty coldly and slowly admits as truth, being hereby made a living part of our moral perceptions. And hence follows the exceeding importance of guarding carefully this great gift of God to every one of us as individual beings: for although we cannot, by a direct act of the reason, alter, or, at our immediate volition, silence, the decision and the voice of moral consciousness, we may, by a course of actions, altogether debase, and even for

the time extinguish it. In examining this part of the subject, it is impossible to separate wholly, even in idea, the acting of God's Holy Spirit through the conscience from the very faculty of conscience itself; for that which affects the one affects the other. Sin, in any shape indulged, grieves, we well know, the blessed Spirit; it is a resisting of His gracious influence, a stopping of the ear to His heavenly teaching; and He does leave those who does resist Him, and thus deprives them of that highest blessing, the indwelling of the Holy One, which keeps the conscience quick and tender, and guards from defilement the first springs of thought, putting into our hearts good desires, and quenching in them at once the fiery darts of the ever-watchful evil one.

But sinful conduct has, too, an effect upon the natural conscience; and when indulged, must surely debase and stifle it. Whenever resisted, its voice of condemnation is clear, and its reproof so painful as scarcely to be borne: but if the feelings which have been thus excited pass away,

they are not again so deeply or readily produced. Each repetition weakens still further their effect, until, by such neglect, the voice of conscience is as surely blunted, as it is impossible at once, and by a single act of the volition, to arrest its instant sentence. It is not merely that we acquire the power of disregarding its voice,—though this is something,—but it is that the judge himself becomes corrupted. The ready perception of right and wrong is lost. Habits ever form for us a platform, from which, as from ground already made, we mount to higher measures of good and evil: conscience ceases to rebuke that to which man has become accustomed. Thus she learns to converse with new sin with less reluctance: testifying less against it, she is more easily overborne by sophisms; and thus her innate powers are lost; for he that has thus tampered with his conscience finds at once that he cannot, even if in some moments of conviction he would, restore to it its early quickness and purity of judgment. He has taught it to call “evil good, and good evil;

to put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; to put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." Woe unto him ! He has lost so far the great boon of the inner ray with which the Lord had gifted, as with the candle of His lighting, the darkness of man's heart ; and it is not in the mere power of his own will to set it in its place again.

This is the debasing work of all allowed sin upon the moral powers of man ; and it is of great moment to observe how from this it follows, as a certain truth, that there is a necessary tendency in any one allowed form of evil to prepare the soul for receiving others. From the general inclination of the heart to yield itself to one reigning sin at one time, this fact is oftentimes forgotten, and men speak as if some sins (moderate licentiousness, for instance, whilst it is decked out with the liveliness of youthful spirits, were rather a drain to the evil of the soul, and tended to prevent the cold and morose selfishness which seems to be a sort of opposite to diffuser and more joyous vice ; whereas, in truth, every single sin indulged

prepares the soul for others, even those of a most opposite exterior, as soon as the form of temptation or the room of opportunity are changed. The dominant sin is all, perhaps, that the spectator notices ; but it is seeding all around it other poisonous plants, which are rooting in the soil beneath its shadow, and will shoot up in their turn into a more visible predominance. And so the riotous selfishness of youth is the best and surest preparation for the peevishness or moroser selfishness of age. It is the curse not of absolute sterility, but rather of a fatal fruitfulness with which all sin has been endued—fruitful is it “after its kind:” different, indeed, are its progeny, and manifold in shape and form, but all alike inheriting the serpent’s nature, all stinging and polluting the unhappy soul which has yielded up itself to be their haunt ; for every sin indulged, by banishing the Spirit of the Holy One, and lowering the moral standard, makes the inroad of a new temptation easier and more natural. And here is the unseen connexion whereby, as by channels hid un-

der the earth, streams which lie far apart are secretly united, springing up again in some new quarter, to the surprise of all, when they have been long buried and forgotten ; and thus it is, that by allowed iniquity a soul becomes most deeply and universally depraved.

But though the actual practice of sin is thus the surest and the readiest way of depraving the moral standard, it is by no means sufficient, in order to prevent this woe, that we watch against the absolute offence of vicious practice. Many other means will, to a great extent, produce the same effect ; and it may be therefore not a little useful to follow this subject out somewhat further.

There is, then, after vicious practice, nothing of which they who would preserve their moral sense unclouded should more cautiously beware, than a needless acquaintance with sin. The first and evident form in which this danger meets us, is from the company of evil men. A thousand causes may make it natural or pleasant to us to enter

lightly into it, and we go without a thought of yielding up our principles ; at first, perhaps, regretting the loose tone around us, and even hurt at the unwonted sight of guilt. But let no man thus trust himself upon forbidden ground. Not to rebuke sin, is to begin to copy it. No man in such a state can know the full amount of evil he is unconsciously imbibing ; how far, by the cunning revelations of the outskirts of iniquity now made to him, his dread of its accursed nature is being stolen from him ; how far, by the seducing influence of example, he is learning to do evil. To allow the company of evil men, is to haunt the antechamber of destruction ; it is the most ascertained and ordinary method of defiling our own conscience.

But the principle extends much further. There are many who shun evil company, and yet allow the same temptation under different forms. It seems clear that man before the fall was unable to realise what moral evil was : it was only by losing innocence that he gained this knowledge. The bait

of the tempter was, that he should become "as God, knowing good and evil;" and when he fell, this false promise was fearfully fulfilled: he gained the power of knowing evil, but, unlike the holy God, he lost his innocence in gaining this knowledge. And if in idea we can place ourselves again in that blessed state of innocence, surely we ourselves must feel that we could not realise what evil is; that we could not truly conceive how there could be any sweetness in rebelling, even by one evil thought, against the just and holy will of God. And in all its subsequent degrees this connexion between knowing evil and being tainted by it, is, practically speaking, far more close than men are willing to imagine. Curiosity still tempts us; the thirst for knowing how and what others feel is strong upon us; and hence the common wish "to know the world and life;" hence the interest taken in the morbid anatomy of their wicked hearts, which the great talents of some evil men have dressed up with every pleasurable artifice. Hence every temptation of the kind. But now trace

the effect of all such intercourse with evil upon the moral sense. The first impression made on one in whom it is quick and lively, by the sight of any wicked action, is horror at its guilt; he sees it, that is to say, in its relation to God's will. Even before he reasons on it, the tender sensibilities with which, like some blessed instinct, God has endued the heart which is comparatively pure, awaken all his feelings, and set him on his guard. But let him live in the voluntary sight of this same action, and how soon will all these feelings fade away! He grows to view the sin as a fact; his reason still admits its evil; but his heart's ready testimony to its hatefulness is gone. Then comes habitual patience of the sight of sin, then an interest in its details, an assimilating of himself in feeling and imagination with the sinner; and how can this be without the moral standard being lowered, and darkness already, in a great measure, taken to be light? From this point the downward steps of evil are too generally rapid. The practice of iniquity will not be delayed much longer; and this, and

an increasing "knowledge of the world," will soon induce him to suspect that all truth and virtue are but cunning veils for vice. He will first doubt, and soon disbelieve, the very existence of truth and holiness;—his own moral rule, that is to say, will be so absolutely bent and falsified, that he will no longer mark that there is any difference between the just and the unjust; in the growing darkness of his heart, good will be put for evil, and evil taken to be good. And to this miserable end has the curiosity of knowing evil led many, step by step, who never dreamed that they were changing, to their ruin, the blessed peace of ignorance for such a fatal knowledge of iniquity.

But perhaps the question is even now rising, How can this supposed duty of avoiding the knowledge of iniquity, be consistent with that wisdom of the serpent which is to blend in the disciples of our Master with the "harmlessness of doves?" We are not, surely, to go forth into the world ignorant of all its evil, and, like children, or those who, through weakness of the understand-

ing, have learned nothing from experience, to trust every one, and view none with suspicion? this surely would make us useless to all, or even oblige us to "go out of the world." This question is well worthy of a practical reply ; for by just such suggestions the temptation of our natural curiosity is plied and aided by the cunning enemy of souls, who, under the false pretext of supplying us with necessary knowledge, would thrust us on a deadly search, which can end only in the poison of our spirits ; whereas the truth which it contains should lead us to another course.

There is undoubtedly a knowledge of evil which is necessary for our due discharge of ordinary duties. It is possible "to be men in understanding," and yet "children as to vice" (*κακία*, 1 Cor. xiv. 20) ; and if we will search, we may find the provisions God has made to secure this very end. It is their privilege "who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. v. 14). It must, that is, be learned, in some way or other, in the *prac-*

tice of God's will and in the progress of the Christian life ; and how this is, we may soon see.

There are some remarkable provisions by which the Christian's power of discrimination can be formed, without encouraging an evil curiosity, or courting any familiarity with vice. For, first, it will grow gradually with the growth of our self-knowledge. Alas! we bear evil always about with us ; and if we search ourselves, we must become acquainted with it. Yet even here we need a caution, for our very self-inspection may become the means of self-defilement. If curiously, and to gratify by the inquiry the excitement of a morbid spirit, we search into ourselves, we may lose even in this search the power of rightly estimating evil ; whilst we puzzle ourselves until we are lost hopelessly in the labyrinth of mixed desires and questionable motives. But there is a provision made by God, by which we may maintain our purity of conscience, whilst thus, by exercise in searching our own hearts, we gain the knowledge of iniquity ; for if, as in His sight, and

with a true thirst for reformation, we do try our practical obedience both of heart and life, we pass this danger by unharmed. The feelings with which our heart has been endued would become, here as elsewhere, blunted by indulgence, if we sought into ourselves for the purpose of awakening them, and then allowed them to pass fruitlessly away: but if the search be dictated by a longing thirst for holiness; if each sin discovered be brought forth and slain before the Lord; if the healing tree of Christ's cross be ever cast into the waters as quickly as we taste their bitterness; if fresh supplies of grace are sought to cleanse the heart, and a deeper contrition striven for as we discover further offences;—then, by this active conduct, the passive feelings of the heart are kept unblunted; while, as effort grows daily into habit, they have done their work; and the higher moral standard which such communing with God, and such gifts of His free grace maintain, purges even at the moment the senses which are “exercised in evil.” The knowledge of “the plague of

his own heart" to which the Christian thus attains carries with it humbling, healing thoughts—higher reverence for God's majesty, a more entire dependence on His grace, a livelier trust in the Redeemer, and so at once pacifies and regulates the conscience.

This is true also of that necessary intermixture with the evil of the world around him from which the disciple of our Lord cannot escape; for here is the same safeguard. He is called, perhaps, by God's providence into some station which compels him to see the sins of evil men; and if his call be clear, he must not, doubtless, shrink back from it to guard his innocence; but let him enter on it, knowing to the full its danger,—remembering that many strong men have fallen down before the spells and witchery of vice, which at first was hateful to them, but which ere long subdued them, when they had learned to gaze calmly on her accursed features. And how is he to be protected? by remembering for what cause alone the Lord can call his witnesses to bear

the neighbourhood of sin, and where their strength is to be found. It can only be to rebuke it, that God's servant is called on to witness sin; never does He require one of His to bear patiently its sight. Interest, ambition, softness, cowardice,—each and all of these in turn may entice him to stand by in silence whilst his God is mocked; but it was not that he thus might earn the bribe of worldly prosperity, that he was called out by God to face His foes—he was not sent to Bethel to feast on Jeroboam's dainties; no—if he must see sin, let him see it to reprove it, and let him reprove it in the might of God; not in the self-confidence of a carnal strength or self-possession, but even as the meanest instrument of Him who is almighty; and with such a safeguard, at God's call, we may walk unharmed even in the fire of present sin. Special grace is ever given to those whom He calls on to endure special temptation. “When thou passest through the waters, *I* will be with thee.”

And here, as before, we may trace the provision God has made for this security in

the nature He has given us. For the feelings of grief and shame which are naturally roused by the first sight of sin, and which of themselves will die away with each repetition, if, from curiosity or the love of excitement, we call them into fruitless exercise, these, when they lead us to strive against the evil which we see, grow into a living habit of resisting sin ; and this habit keeps the conscience quick and tender, and, through the blessing of God's grace, purifies and strengthens the power of moral judgment beyond all other means of wholesome exercise.

Thus it is that God's especial witnesses have borne, amidst an evil generation, the burden of His holiness and truth. Thus, by boldly resisting sin, in His strength and in His sight, have they learned to view with deeper shame and sorrow the iniquity whose secrets they discerned, until, weary of this evil earth, they have cried one by one unto the Lord, with the prophet on the mount of God, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts, because the children of

Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword" (1 Kings, xix. 14).

But how wholly different a state of mind is this from that "knowledge of the world" which has learned to doubt of the existence of virtue, to suspect all of secret vice; which is the very essence of practical unbelief, and the foulest debasement of a man's own moral powers; and which is, as we have seen, the fruit, not only of habitual sin, but of seeking for acquaintance with iniquity, not to work its reformation, but to gratify our curiosity, or stimulate our feelings. Who can estimate too highly the horrors of this state, when "forasmuch as men did not like to retain God in their knowledge, he has given them over unto a reprobate mind?" (Rom. i. 28). Who can deem too terribly even of that condition which does but border on this hopeless end? Day by day its misery increases; and, in exact proportion, grows too its hopelessness. Excess eats out the very faculty of natural enjoyment with which the earlier days of sin are for the

most part gladdened. Youthful sins are generally pleasurable, and so they continue till their bonds are firm; but the gilding soon wears off the chain. The mouth of the net is strewed with tempting baits; but when the soul is once entangled, there are no more of these, and it is driven on amongst the meshes. The sins of mature years, and still more those of age, are not even tricked out with the appearances of pleasure. No man thinks that the griping covetousness, or the cold selfishness, or the peevish irritation, or the cynical asperity of later years, are pleasurable even to their victims; and yet these only are the gifts which vice has in store for those who graduate in her school. And, as it becomes more wretched, a state of sin becomes at the same time more hopeless. The Holy Spirit of the Lord forsakes more and more the polluted dwelling-place; the moral judgment is thoroughly defiled, and scarce, even in the extremest cases, knows what is sin and what is not, until it comes to "rejoice in iniquity." And what is there—what can there be, in God's world,

here or hereafter, for him who is “given over to a reprobate mind,” save the “blackness of darkness for ever?”

And even in the instances which reach not to this extreme ruin, how sore a loss is that of a tender conscience! Though, of God’s infinite mercy, the soul is awakened to repentance; though the blessed Spirit puts into it a desire to return—and every such desire, as His gift, is a sure earnest that it may return—that the Lord waiteth to be gracious—that Christ Jesus will receive him, and deliver him from sin;—yet still how great is its loss! We do see that, by the working of God’s grace, tenderness of conscience and the quickness of the moral judgment return even to those who have gone on in sin; and therefore do we preach Christ’s blessed Gospel to them, not paring down or limiting its full efficiency, as if we secretly feared to use our remedy, but boldly telling even them that there is a power in it to heal their deadliest leprosy. Yet still the loss is great. It is a weary road that such must travel; and warns us to keep earnestly this

good gift of God, rather than to hope to gain it back again when lost.

To take but two examples. How hard is it for men who have once lost it, to regain the full measure of entire sincerity—and that not in the entanglements of practice only, and under the pressure of old temptations, but even in the judgment. How hardly do they get again the ready indignation against little conventional or personal deceits with which their soul was once freely stored; how long do they need to pray, and watch, and weep, and keep the blessed company of holy words and thoughts, and seek for grace most earnestly, before they attain to such a state of soul that, readily, instantly, and without an effort, they can in any measure see all things around them as they are seen by Him who is the God of truth!

Take one other instance. It is one peculiar blessing of childhood, that every thing around it is real; as every thing around the hardened worldly sceptic is unreal. In religious truth this is an especial blessing, and

it depends mainly on the clearness of the moral sense: and they who have, even in the lower degrees, tampered with conscience—nay, who have not watched closely to maintain its power and life—are sure to suffer here: they will be continually tempted to admit religious truth as an intellectual fact, rather than to assimilate it to their inner constitution by their moral powers; to see what is right, and to approve of it in a certain speculative manner, and yet to feel that they do not in truth prefer it, and so do not indeed practise it. This is a most painful and wearisome temptation, and not the least so because it peculiarly besets holy things,—reading the word of God—prayer—meditation—and the use of sacraments. Nay, the more we are conversant in holy things, without setting our inner heart on them, the more it assaults us; until, like the miserable prophet in the first lesson for this day, who “loved the wages of iniquity,” even the word of the Lord becomes to us a sound, and the visions of the Almighty as a dream; and, like him, though our “eyes be

open," it is but "in a trance" and as an unreality that we see the very truth of God.

Out of such a state we cannot reason ourselves—we must live ourselves out of it. We must, that is, by communing with God, and living in His sight, and seeking healing grace from Him, repair slowly this our loss. But how much better is it, not to incur it! for which purpose our care must be extreme. We must strive not only against injuring our souls by sin or needless acquaintance with iniquity, even in its least offensive features; but we must watch over our use of holy things, guard against the first temptations which would lead us to treat religion rather as a science than an art—a thing to be learned rather than to be lived;—against all exaltation, or separation even, of the forms of piety above or from their essence; against the taking up certain religious views, and then defending and maintaining them in argument, as an exercise of the intellect and a triumph of party, rather than seeking silently and soberly to learn truth upon our knees, and to

shew it in our lives; walking with the Lord in secret communion, and before men, in an easy and unostentatious denial of ourselves. For this is what we need: that truth should be made one with us, purifying all our moral judgments, and be "in us as a well of water, springing up unto eternal life." But they who think lightly of such care, or weary of such diligence, are sure, as they grow older, to be tried with this temptation: to find the reality of unseen things diminish; to feel the veil of unreality drawn more and more between themselves and the eternal world; and as it would "profit us nothing to have all faith, so that we could remove mountains," whilst we lack Christian "charity," so is the most splendid outward piety, and the most convincing tongue, and the subtlest and clearest intellect exercised on holy things, but a miserable barter for the realising simplicity of a childish faith, taught, by God's Holy Spirit, the plainest saving truths of Christ's Gospel. They, too, who acquiesce in such a state, live ever in the neighbourhood of a still greater danger:

doubts of God's truth are ever ready to fall upon such souls, to eat out all the reality of things unseen ; to come most thickly at holy seasons, when the weary spirit would most be free from them ; and to settle ever hereafter in the heart as their accustomed haunt.

For peace, then, as well as for safety, let us strive to keep in all its brightness this most precious jewel, and "exercise" ourselves, like the great apostle, to "have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men ;" and for this end mainly let us take with us these two cautions.

First, that with the lowest thoughts of our own worth or goodness, we yet strive to keep always alive within us a reverence for our own souls ; that we remember whose image they bear, whose blood hath been shed for them, whose Spirit dwells within them ; that we think of them as a great trust, as the very jewels of Christ's crown, given to us to keep and brighten for eternity : that we bear in mind how sin must soil and injure them ; and then how sure must be the loss, how uncertain the re-

covery. And so, in the very hotness of temptation, instead of thinking of transgression as a trifle, and therefore being overbaited by the sweetness of the lure, we shall, of God's mercy, see something of its most accursed nature, and of the loss and damage it must bring upon us.

To confirm which safeguard, endeavour to bear always with you a remembrance of God's nearness to you. Strive practically to view things as they should seem to those with whom the Holy One is present. This will keep your moral standard pure, and its weights perfect as the balance of the sanctuary: this will help you, amidst the low tones of conventional morality, to refer all to that pure commandment of the Lord, which "giveth light unto the eyes." Walking thus with Him will fill your soul with awe, as one whom God hath made; with fear, as one whom the Lord must judge; and yet with grateful assurance, as one whom Christ hath "redeemed from the hand of the enemy."



SERMON V.

THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST.

SERMON V.

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.”—Matt. iv. 1.

IN all parts of the Christian's life, he that would walk steadily and surely must keep his eyes fixed upon his great Exemplar; but especially when trials wax severe, and the way is truly strait, will he need such solace to his weakness; and there is no rough place where his Master has not left the imprint of his footsteps; there are no sufferings, toil, or temptations, through which He has not passed before us; “He was in all points tempted like as we are;” whatever is our burden, its weight is known and familiar to Him to whom we have to look for strength.

For this reason it is, doubtless, that on Sunday next, the first in Lent, the Church meets us in the gospel of the day with the record of our Lord's temptation. She would thus seasonably animate our fainting resolu-

tions ; for whatever the softness of these easy times may whisper, she did undoubtedly intend to call men in that season to practise, in some way or other, more than usual self-discipline and mortifying of the flesh ; and knowing how distasteful are such exercises to the common run of Christians, and the various temptations to which such a season must expose them, she meets them at its opening with the record of their Master's fasting and temptation, to be at once their best example, and their chief support in such a course.

Now, it will not be questioned by any who watch closely the working of their own or others' minds, that a great part of the force and power of our blessed Lord's example here is lost on men, through their slipping it aside, by secretly imagining that, after all, His case and theirs are wholly different. They read of His being tempted ; and as they do not disbelieve the Scriptures, they admit in a certain way that He was ; that is, they never question it. But practically speaking, and meaning by temptation such

temptations as they yield to, they do not believe that He was tempted: they have a secret reserve — “Christ was tempted, as far as He could be tempted; but how could He who was God as well as man be *really* tempted? what was there in Him to tempt?” By such and such-like questions the practical example of our Lord is wholly set aside; and men lose the benefit which was designed for them in holy Scripture, when in it were noted down these awful struggles of the prince of darkness with the Captain of our salvation.

This is, in fact, the leaven from which the earliest heresies arose; it is an attempt to explain the great mystery of the incarnation, by resolving the human nature of our Lord into an economical appearance. As such, it shows in two ways forcibly the great importance of accurately holding, and distinctly bringing out, the dogmas of the Christian faith: first, because it exhibits—what is always doubtless true, though it cannot always be so clearly traced—the connexion which there is between a weakened

Christian life and a creed unsound even on those points which men call subtle and abstruse : and, secondly, because it shews how heresies spring, not from some peculiar temper of their time, but from the common tendencies of our fallen nature ; and how, therefore, we may look for their return, if a watchful jealousy for ascertained conclusions be at any time remitted in the Church. Peculiar seasons, indeed, favour the growth of one or other form of error, and aid its full development ; but it is as spring draws forth the verdure of the earth : the various seeds, dormant hitherto, but now apparent in their growth, were ready there, or the sun and showers had never called them into an evident life : and the seeds of error are in the heart, waiting to spring up again, when the creeds and symbols which suppressed them have lost amongst us their vitality and power.

For both these reasons, then, to give life to the example of our Lord, and to keep up the Church's witness against latent heresy, it will not be in vain to bring out, in some detail, the doctrine which these rising thoughts oppose.

That doctrine is the true incarnation of the Son of God; to receive which rightly, these four truths, opposed to as many ancient heresies, must be distinctly apprehended.

1. That the eternal Son of God was in very deed of one substance and glory with the Father, God of God, Light of Light; severed only into the person of the Son, in the unity of the Godhead, by the addition to “the substance of God” of “this property, to be of the Father.”*

2. That this eternal Son or Word of God did, in the fulness of time, take unto Himself our very nature, through the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary; so that henceforward He was truly man, in body, mind, and soul, as much as before this He had been truly God.

3. That in His one person these two distinct natures were not confused together, the Godhead ceasing to be truly the Godhead through mixture of the manhood therewith, or the manhood ceasing to be in very deed humanity through the alliance of Deity

* Hooker.

thereto ; but each in one person preserving the essential limits of their own true several being, unmixed and unconfused. And,

4. That this union of two natures was strictly in one person ; since the old error, which maintained the existence of two persons in the Christ, must in truth do away with one, either by making two Christs, one God, the other man ; or else by destroying the unity of His Godhead or His manhood.

Of these four great truths, the subject of Christ's temptation is conversant mainly with the second and the third.

For, first, to be truly tempted, Christ must be truly man. Unless His temptations, His sufferings, and His death, were all wrought in appearance only, there must be that nature truly in Him which is capable of these accidents. And this, in its fullest significance, is the doctrine of the catholic Church. That Christ did truly take our nature to Himself, of the very natural substance of His virgin-mother, with a body truly and really derived from hers ; and as a body, so also the higher parts of our mixed nature,—

a mind and will dwelling in a reasonable soul. And to the full perception of this truth, it must be noted, that the nature He took was the human nature as it was in His mother; not, as some have fancied, the nature of Adam before his fall; for how should He have obtained that nature from the Virgin Mary, who herself possessed it not? and if He had, how could He have been "in all points like as we are, sin only excepted?" for we know not that in Adam's body were all those sinless infirmities which dwell in ours, and which indeed we acknowledge in our Lord's. Before the fruit of the forbidden tree had poisoned the currents of his blood, we know not that pain, and weariness, and sickness, could have invaded that body which from God's hand had come forth "very good," and which, we doubt not, by the fruit of the tree of life was to have been strengthened till it could not taste of death. But the body which our blessed Lord assumed was subject, like our own, to those infirmities which have not in them the nature of sin, and yet which sin has brought into

our nature. He was weary and a-thirst with His mid-day journey; He was faint with buffetings and scourgings, and the heavy burden of the cross; agony of mind wrought fearfully on His body. He was, as we are, liable to death. And herein was shewed His marvellous love, "in taking," as St. Bernard saith, "my flesh upon Him, my very flesh, not that which Adam had before his fault."* The contrary opinion has arisen from the pious but mistaken fear, lest in allowing that Christ took the very nature of His mother, we should unawares allow that He took what was sinful: but the true answer to this apprehension is, that the Eternal Son took to Himself, in the womb of the Virgin, not a human person, but humanity—humanity, which, if it had been impersonated in one of us would have been sinful, but which could not be sinful until it was a person, and was

* "In quo enim magis commendare poterat benignitatem suam, quàm suscipiendo carnem meam? Meam, inquam, non carnem Adam, id est non qualem ille habuit ante culpam."—ST. BERN. *in Epiph.* Serm. I. sec. 2. vol. i. p. 796.

never a person till it was in the Christ. "To His own person He assumed a man's nature. The flesh, and the conjunction of the flesh with God, began at one instant. . . And that which in Him made our nature uncorrupt, was the union of His deity with our nature."*

Here we approach the second great truth which now concerns us, namely, that these two natures, though thus conjoined in one person, were not confounded the one with the other; that neither was the proper Godhead of the Son diminished by inferior admixture, nor the humanity swollen out of the true limits of its essential properties by the alliance of Deity. To it, indeed, Deity added that infinite worth which made it a fit sacrifice for sin; to it, that grace of unction unmeasured, by which it was held up ever without spot of iniquity: but still each nature was separate and unconfused; and thus, in the unity of the Godhead, could Christ declare on earth that the Son of Man was in heaven; thus could He truly suffer

* Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity, v. p. 52.

and die in His human body, though the Godhead is impassible and immortal; thus could He, in His human soul, be "in an agony," though Deity can never suffer; thus could He pray, "Father, not my will, but thine be done," while He could declare, "I and my Father are one." Here, then, was the provision made for the reality of His temptation; for in whatever way Satan can approach us from without, by the influences of a spiritual presence, as suggesting to the imagination, and throwing into the mind, that which is at once temptation, and becomes sin as soon as the will has given to it the first beginnings of assent; in this same way are we enforced, by the verity of His human soul, to believe that the Son of God could be approached by Satan. "For," to use the words of Hooker, "as the parts, degrees, and offices of that mystical administration did require which he voluntarily undertook, the beams of Deity did in operation always accordingly either restrain or enlarge themselves." So that, to make His exposure to temptation perfect, we must sup-

pose no sinless avenues to its approach which in us are open, closed in Him. The fiery darts, indeed, found in that most true, loyal soul no sinful tendencies on which to fall; they were cast back at once from the confines of His imagination by a will truly in accordance with the will of the Father, and dwelt in beyond measure by the present influence of the Spirit of all grace. So that, with a perfect exposure to temptation, spot of sin there could be clearly none; and so is fulfilled in Him the declaration that "He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Such are the mysterious truths we must keep clear in our remembrance, if we would view aright this wonderful relation.

But there is one other feeling apt to possess our minds, and rob us of the sense of its reality, and therefore of its practical effect. When we read of the tempter approaching with his wiles Him whom we thus know to be the Lord incarnate, God the maker of all being, we have something of the feeling with which we read of those imaginary con-

flicts in which man is supposed to strive against beings of a higher order: we feel, that is, as if there could be no real contest; that it is but the apparent acting out of what would be naturally impossible. When we compare the paltry baits with the infinite worthiness of Him to whom they were proffered, we feel so sure of the conclusion, that, knowing the craft and subtilty of the tempter, we cannot believe that he could thus attempt to turn aside the perfect uprightness of God's only Son.

Here, then, we need the recollection, that to him had not been made the revelation we possess of Christ's eternal power and Godhead: that from him was kept secret, as St. Ignatius writes, "the virginity of Mary, and Him who was born of her, as also the death of our Lord; three of the mysteries the most spoken of in the world, yet done in secret by God:"* that all he knew was, that this was the Champion of man, the Holy One of God, the second Adam, with whom, as with the first, was to be his great

* St. Ign. ad Ephes. c. 19.

struggle for the dominion of this world. He knew that he had triumphed once, by like temptations, over the same nature unfallen: that, when it came pure from God's hands, very good in its own essence, and dwelt * in by the gifts of God's grace, even then it had not availed to resist his crafts; and how should it fare better now? What so far greater power could be allied with it, as to make that which had since fallen and become acquainted with infirmities unnumbered, yet able to resist his might? Ages too of temptation had sharpened his subtilty: not a saint along the whole line had he ever left untempted—not one had perfectly resisted temptation. One more such triumph over David's Son as that which he had gained on David, and man was his for ever;

* See Bishop Bull on the State of Man before the Fall. "That our first parents, besides the seeds of natural virtue and religion sown in their minds, in their very creation, and besides the natural innocence and rectitude, wherein also they were created, were endowed with certain gifts and powers supernatural infused by the Spirit of God; and that in these gifts their perfection consisted."—Prop. ii. p. 1091.

his malicious hatred gratified, and God's purposes of mercy turned aside.

How exactly then, in this view, does the history of this temptation accord with all that is revealed to us of Satan. Here is the same craft in conception, the same boldness in daring, the same certain limits both to knowledge and to power, the same sure defeat in issue. What is this but the whole history of his resisting God? of the baffled strivings of malicious craft against the calm sovereignty of the Almighty.

And when we look at the temptation in this light, how strikingly does it fall in with the whole course of God's revealed dealings! Throughout the Old Testament Satan is scarcely mentioned; and in the New he is less emphatically the enemy of God than of Christ, as if between the prince of this world and the Son of Man must lie the mighty struggle. Such, says St. Augustine, was the scheme of all God's dealings: "*Diabolus non potentiâ Dei, sed justitiâ superandus fuit.*"* It was to be a moral conquest,

* St. Aug. de Trin. xiii. cap. 17.

not one of power alone, by which the enemy was overcome; for if it were not so, there could have been no resistance of God's will, "nam quid Omnipotentis potentius?" and so no display of all His moral attributes in man's deliverance. Thus every where in the New Testament, as here in the wilderness, - it is a struggle between Christ and Satan: and his evil agency is now revealed and manifest; possessions now show their real character; Satan's baffled counterworking comes to light wherever the Redeemer enters. And here is the peculiar key to the temptation of our Lord. It is at the opening of His ministry; just as before its close there was one more such evident and open struggle with the spirits of evil, when it was again "their hour and the power of darkness"—not that the intermediate time was free from such fierce strife, but that these are more expressly stated, to reveal to us the whole complexion of that life-long struggle. And in this first, especially, its characters are plain. It is an evident meeting of the leaders in this great encounter. The

Christ is led up to it by the Spirit; He goes as the bearer of humanity, the ἀληθινὸς ἄνθρωπος, the Son of Man—as the second Adam, the federal Head of all, “the one true and perfect flower which had ever unfolded itself out of the root and stalk of humanity.” He is led into the wilderness, “in desertum,” as Aquinas has it, “quasi in campum certaminis.” As the second Adam, “He did this,” says St. Basil, “mystically, to free the first Adam from his exile, for he was cast into the wilderness from paradise.” He was led there to be tried by evil; and as within Him evil could not be, the tempter came to Him:—the evil was from without:—the tempter came, not probably in the grossness of a visible form, but as he comes to us, casting the secret spells of sense and earthliness upon the imagination, and seeking thereby to seduce the heart and will. The very form and nature of the several temptations carries back our thoughts to man’s last great struggle with the evil one in the person of the first head of his race. In each case it is through the bodily appetite that

the tempter first seeks to insinuate his poison. "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." So too in the following temptations, the same springs are touched in either case:—"Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods;" so ran the lying promise to arouse within them empty and vain-glorious wishes. "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down;" and again, "All these things will I give thee." So he sought to succeed the second time.

Nor let the reality of the temptations here again escape our notice. It was, as a whole, an evident suggestion that He should avoid the life of pain and trial which lay all marked out before Him. And there are two points in His after-life which give us some insight into the reality and strength of this temptation: the one is, the severity of that reproof with which He checked the same suggestion from the mouth of Peter—"Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou art an offence, *σκάνδαλον*, unto me!" The other the

exceeding sorrowfulness of that prayer at Gethsemane, when He sought, that "if it were possible the cup might pass from" Him.

And so the struggle went on, but not to such an issue as before. No frauds or wiles of Satan could seduce His loyalty, who now in human nature wrestled with the evil one. The "prince of this world had nothing in Him;" he fled abashed at the rebuke, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written;" and "behold angels came and ministered unto" their Lord.

The many lessons of practical wisdom which flow from this astonishing narration, illustrate strikingly the close connexion of the dogmas of our faith with the conduct of a holy life. A few of them shall now be noticed.

First, then; nothing can more tend to raise within us due apprehensions of our blessed Master's sufferings for us, than the contemplation of this scene. And this frame of mind lies very near to the foundation of a Christian temper. It is, indeed, easy to

speaking at random on the subject, and to have the mouth full of words about the Saviour's sufferings; but it is not easy to have their memory stored up within the heart: to walk amidst the distractions and the pleasures of this life, as the children of the bride-chamber when the bridegroom is gone: to be as those were who had learned to look to Him for all things, and to lean on Him always: to check the flood-tide of youthful passion; and to sanctify the bustle of mid-life cares; and to sweeten the moroseness of age; and to abate an over-dazzling joy; and to cheer a pressing sorrow, with the heart-remembrance of Him who was the King of Glory, and who for us walked this miserable earth for thirty years and more, as the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. This is hard; for it is hard to "walk by faith, and not by sight." And there are few means more useful for attaining to this temper, than the following out in thoughtful meditation such a subject as is here opened to us. We are apt to take a general view of the sufferings of our Lord;

we have heard of them from our infancy ; and the very constant hearing of them tends to make their impression on our minds the duller : we admit them, and that is all : we pass a sort of fantastic sleight upon our selves ; it is as if His sufferings had not been real. Follow up, then, such thoughts as here open on us to redress this grievous injury to our Redeemer : see that His sufferings were most real : that every bodily agony told on Him who was perfect man : that every struggle and anguish of soul was to Him deeper and more cutting than to any child of Adam : that for Him to wrestle with Satan, to bear his presence and suggestions, to look on sin, to see His Father's countenance in clouds, to endure for us His wrath, — that these were real and most utterly unfathomable depths of sorrow. Remember, too, their voluntary character. Men cannot escape from suffering : it is their utmost reach of obedience when they taste without refusing the cup from which they cannot turn aside : but HE drained it calmly to the dregs, who could have turned

away from it; who as man was tried with the continual temptation so to turn, and who therefore renewed in every moment the entireness of self-sacrifice to sorrow.— To have stored up within our hearts such true remembrances, does indeed lie near to the foundation of a Christian character; for from them must flow the actions and affections by which the Christian is distinguished from other men. What else can make us “endure hardness as good soldiers of the cross?” What else can truly shew us, that a dreamy, sentimental, self-indulgent temper, wide in its concessions of indulgence to all others so they thwart us not, but widest to ourselves—is not the temper of a Christian soldier? Surely to the heart which walks in the continual presence of his Master’s sufferings, there must be more reality in self-denial and in bearing of the cross than ordinary Christians dream of: surely, in many a moment when he too might yield to softness of spirit, or be dazzled with the shows of the gilded scene around him, there will be the whisper of an inward voice re-

minding him,—“ Forasmuch as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind” (1 Pet. iv. 1). How is it that the path which HE walked is so unlike to ours? His so rough and strait, ours so wide and easy? Must there not be something in the ordinary standard of a Christian life which will not endure in the day of trial? Is there not much which makes even death fearful, and which must therefore make judgment horrible? If a sharp fit of sickness startles Christians, how will they with no better preparation bear the midnight cry, or hear the sound of the trumpet as it waxes louder and louder?

And as this subject will thus yield us both motives and measures for obedience, so too will it supply us with directions for the due resisting of temptation. For this end, doubtless, was its history recorded in the Scriptures; for this end, in great measure, was it suffered by the Lord.

“ Tentari se passus est Imperator, ut doceret militem dimicare.” *

* S. Aug., Serm. li. 2. vol. v. p. 283.

“Pati te docuit, et patiendo te docuit.”*

A broad light is thrown by it on every part of temptation. We see the need of watching alway. No height of piety is a sufficient safeguard against danger. He who dared to molest with his accursed frauds the very Lord of Glory when the brightness of His majesty was veiled in our humanity, will not fear to assault any of His followers. We must therefore be prepared for conflict: not merely, as the easy scepticism of the day will readily admit, with the principle of evil, but with an actually living, subtile, and most powerful enemy. If this temptation teaches us one single lesson, surely it is this. The principle of evil can mean nothing else than our own inward inclinations to it. By this our Master could not have been tempted, for He had within no evil inclination: either, therefore, He could not be tempted, or it must be by a spirit external to himself, and having, therefore, truly a separate existence. It is, therefore, a most explicit comment on the written word of caution, “be

* S. Aug., Serm. cclxxxiv. 5. vol. v. p. 1144.

sober, be vigilant; for your great adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

But more than this; we see the sort of wiles against which we must watch—that the evil which seems farthest off is oftentimes the nighest. The fast of forty days had surely shewn the absolute dominion with which the flesh was curbed in Him to whom the tempter came; yet is his first temptation a suggestion that He should turn the stones around Him into bread. And who that has watched over himself has not known times when the sharpness of some maintained fast has been directly followed by the enticing frauds of carnal imaginations, or the severity of some difficult sacrifice succeeded by an intruding train of earthly and self-seeking thoughts?

We see, too, with how prompt a readiness the forms of temptation are exchanged. It is not one, and then rest. From sensuality and doubt, how easily did Satan turn to presumption, and from that pass over to the baits of earthly glory, as instruments where-

with to beguile that human heart which only was for ever proof against his snares! And so, when we have resisted the coarser temptations of sensuality, or a thirst for worldly advancement, how readily do self-applauding thoughts spring up to poison the purged soil of the heart; or, when we have shut out the louder solicitations of evil, are we drawn unawares, and, if need be, by the very words of holy writ, into an attempt to worship God in some new way, and so to approach his altar with the abominable offering of a party-zeal or self-taught service!

And so, all through the struggle, how full of teaching is our blessed Lord's example! With what a perfect patience did He endure the struggle to the end; not as we are wont to do, fretting under it, and peevishly longing for the "rest of the garner,"* while it is God's will that we should still be "planted in the field!" And yet, with this entire patience, how prompt was His resistance, never yielding for a moment to that which He endured to the end! How directly was the

* "Alia est agri conditio, alia quies horrei."—S. AUG.

sword of the Spirit raised against each following temptation, and how did it pierce through the fraud! "Behold," says St. Augustine,† "the Prince of martyrs setting forth an example of contention! For what cause did He suffer Himself to be tempted, but that He might teach us how to resist the tempter? The world promises its fleshly pleasure; reply to it, But God is more to be desired. The world promises its honours; tell it, That God's kingdom is more glorious far. The world promises unhallowed knowledge; reply to it, That only the truth of God is infallible." Let this one thought of God meet every seduction of the tempter, and they will all fall down before it.

And but once more: As in this tempta-

† "Adtendite martyrum Ducem exemplorum certamina proponentem. . . . Quare se permisit tentari, nisi ut doceret resistere tentatori? Promittit mundus carnalem voluptatem; responde illi, Delectabilior est Deus. Promittit mundus honores; responde illi, Altius est omnibus regnum Dei. Promittit mundus superfluas vel damnabiles curiositates; responde illi, Sola non errat veritas Dei."—Id., Serm. cclxxxiv. 5.

tion there is full instruction how we ought to strive against the evil one, so is there too a sure earnest of our victory. Satan dared indeed to assault our Lord, but he did not triumph over Him. Here all his practised frauds were vain and fruitless; and He overcame the devil in our nature, that we might be partakers of His triumph. From us, as we are taught, He took flesh, that we from Him might have salvation. "In Him we were tempted; in Him we vanquish Satan."*

He who in our flesh rebuked Satan in the wilderness of Judea, hath pledged His word to every member of His body mystical, "Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you." He knows Satan's strength, and He knows our weakness, not by the poverty of our most earnest description, but by the remembered reality of His own struggle. "He hath suffered being tempted, that He might know how to succour them that are tempted." He hath passed through the bat-

* "In illo nos tentati sumus, in illo nos diabolum superamus."—S. AUG. *Exercit. in Ps. ix. 3.*

tle; but He will not forget those whom He hath left to follow Him. He is God, over all; but He has not ceased to be the Virgin's Son. We go not, in our extremity, to one who "cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but who in all points was tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Let us trust more in His sympathy, and cast ourselves more truly on His care. Every doubt and fear, every fierce arrow of sore temptation, hath been aimed at Him before it can harass us; and He who resisted all will now let His strength be perfected in our weakness. He sees our secret tears, our unsuspected struggles, our hidden conflicts with the enemy; and He ministers strength to our weakness. He is near, though the eye sees Him not. He is ready to succour, when we seem forsaken; He "will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able;" He "will make a way to escape;" and at the darkest hour, so that our souls cleave to the word of promise, we shall be delivered, and even these buffetings of Sa-

tan be seen to have been for our advantage; and then when we too, in the power of Christ, and, it may be, after a sore struggle, have conquered the evil one, the devil shall “depart from” us, and “angels come and minister unto” us.



SERMON VI.

**DOING ALL TO THE GLORY OF
GOD.**

SERMON VI.

“Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”—1 Cor. x. 31.

THIS is one of those brief and wonderful sentences of which God’s word is full. Uttering the deepest things with the easiest and most familiar simplicity, they are passed over by too many as ordinary sayings, with little in them worthy of especial notice; whilst, in truth, that very simplicity is the mark of their divine original: they are often those hidden secrets of wisdom for which ages and generations have strained and pined in vain, but which are now, by God’s teaching, put into the mouths of very babes and sucklings.

So is it here. In these few words, which charge us “to do all to the glory of God,” there is that truth after which the best earthly philosophy was always reaching forth

in vain : there is the very pith and conclusion of the Gospel of Christ our Lord : there is the living practical end of its teaching to every one of us as reasonable beings : there is that which in as far as we realise and act out, we truly and indeed are Christians : for there is that living and practical revelation to us of our restoration to our due and proper place in God's world, without which life must be to us a riddle, and we ourselves a fruitless puzzle.

Let us then follow out this subject, and see, first, how it involves the solution of the dark mystery of our life and of ourselves. When, then, the most thoughtful men of old looked forth into the world around them, how lost and confounded were all their speculations ! They saw every thing in broken lights and endless contradictions : good and evil, pain and pleasure, misery and joy, were so closely and so strangely mingled, that the whole constitution of things was hopelessly entangled. They knew not how a good God could permit or cause such misery, nor how an evil God should mingle so much blessing with his curses.

And if from others and without, they turned their thoughts and their examination inward on themselves, they found the darkness thicken over them: they themselves were to themselves the greatest puzzle and contradiction of all. There was such a mixture of what was great and what was small; of high desires and purposes, and of low and miserable aims and actions; of what was almost too bad even for this earth, and what was evidently fitted for, and aiming after, something far better than it,—that they knew not how in any way to solve the perplexing enigma. They could not settle wherein their chief good lay; what was the true end and object of their lives; or whether time was bearing them. They knew not whether, as some taught, their bodily sensations alone, and things palpable, were realities; or whether, as others maintained, these were mere incumbrances, which they might, as their inclination lay, either despise and trample on, or indulge, as things foreign to themselves. But, above all, the voice of God within themselves haunted and dis-

tracted them: that unwritten living law, which they continually transgressed, tormented and embarrassed them. The clearer became this moral sense in any, the greater must become the strife; because the sense of sin, without the knowledge of an atonement, was the most distracting apprehension to man. So that "he walked" indeed "in a vain shadow, and disquieted himself in vain." Dark shades were all around him, look which way he would; but the thickest darkness of all was within, when from others he looked into himself.

Now, on all this strife and confusion rose the blessed Gospel of Christ, as a healing and a harmonising light. Confused and blended forms severed themselves into their peculiar proportions; causes and conclusions were united; broken lights were gathered into one. In the world around might now be seen the work of a good and holy God, marred by the sin and wilfulness of His creatures. There was this clue to the continued entanglement, that He was even now working to bring good out of evil.

This world was the skirt of His garment ; in it He was dimly visible even now to faith, as He one day would be to open sight: the shadows which had blotted creation hastened themselves to fly away. But most especially on himself, and on the marvellous mystery of his own nature, had the light of heaven fallen. Now he saw why he was so full of greatness and littleness ; now was interpreted the longing of his spirit for something higher than himself ; and, what was of far more moment than all speculative knowledge, now the groaning misery of his conscience was healed. He saw that the sin which had tormented him, and of which before he knew not whether it was or was not part of his own very self, was not himself, but was his enemy ; that it was this which had broken his relation to God ; and in breaking that relation had taken from him all the true end of his being ; had armed God's purer creation against him, and bid it reject him, a polluted and unholy being, from endeavouring to mingle in the service of a holy God ; yea, beyond this,

had armed himself against himself—had brought the strife which had consumed him within his own heart. But he now learned, also, that God had wrought wonderfully to bring him back again into this relation to Himself; that his Lord had taken his very nature, that, through the mystery of the incarnation, He might constitute Himself anew the perfect and righteous Head of the fallen race, and so present him again as holy and acceptable before God: that this had been done for him; and that he, as having been through baptism united to this his Head, might now look up again to God his Father without doubt or terror, as one reconciled to him in Christ Jesus.

Here, then, the mystery was solved: he took again his place in God's creation, as in a Father's family: now, when he met with sin or misery, whether in himself or in the world around him, it was not as a mystery and a wonder, but as a detected enemy—as the foe of his own peace and of his Father's glory. He knew his place in God's world, and he knew the secret of its apparent con-

traditions : he could take that place, and walk amongst those contradictions, and hear, with a living meaning flowing forth from them, the words, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." And all this depended, not upon the theoretical admission of some alleged truths, but upon the actual restoration of his relation to God as a Father, by his being engrafted into Christ the very Son. This privilege was his, as being a member of the Church of the redeemed, whose special charge it is here on earth to "shew forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light."*

All this, moreover, in the second place, is not the solution of a merely speculative difficulty ; it is the very practical spring of a new activity of life. Every man who has not learned to look upon himself, and all around him, in this light, must be infected more or less with the benumbing spirit of the Manichæan philosophy : he cannot see clearly God's hand in this His visible gar-

* 1 Pet. ii. 9.

ment of time. The leaven may work secretly, but it must be there : it may lead him to make his religion principally a speculation—to satisfy himself with better feelings, though his works are evil : or if not this, yet to have, as it were, two selves ; one, that which mingles with this world as if it were hopelessly corrupt ; one, that which retires when it can into the purity of the mount : it may do even less than this ; it may lead him to delight to dwell in thought upon the service he shall render his Master in another world ; enduring this life as a necessary preparation for it, rather than living it as but another scene of the next : but it must diminish that hearty, straightforward earnestness of service with which he can serve God, who sees that in this life, in his place in the Church, he is as much accepted of God, and has as much a part of His work to do—is as truly a fellow-worker with Him—as he shall ever be in the world to come.

As, moreover, this view of his restored relation to his God gives him the true spring for present exertion, so does it restore his

broken relations to his fellow-men, amongst whom, and for whom, he is to work. Believing firmly, as he does, not that a few out of mankind have been restored by Christ to the peace which they had lost, but that this has been wrought by Christ for the whole race of man, every man has, through Christ, become again his brother. A new and a heavenly light has been poured upon every earthly connexion and relationship: they are now all glorified. He has given up all to Christ; but it has been to receive all back, as from the dead. All are figures and symbols of heavenly things: and not figures and symbols only, but instruments too, and opportunities of heavenly working: God is working through them, and he is working with God. He does not need to undervalue them, lest he should dwell too much upon them; he delights to exalt them, because in exalting them he is exalting instruments of God's own appointment.

Again, as the perception of this restored relation thus quickens his energies in working for God, so too does it give him a happy

liberty and freedom in his work. He is working for God, and with God's providence; he need not perplex himself about results: these are God's, not his. No doubt he will be tempted, like others, to aim at ends which seem to him to be good, instead of contenting himself with the means which he may know are good: but then he sees that this is a temptation—he does not encourage himself in it; and this by degrees works in a man a noble freedom and liberty of action. It is from this that great deeds spring; it is in this spirit that a man can be contented to labour in the Church for some good end, which may not be accomplished for ages to come; which may bless future generations, when it has been forgotten on the earth, that such an one as he ever lived upon it; “for his judgment is with the Lord, and his work with his God.”* And this spirit of liberty, as of God's freedman, will in a marvellous way animate and ennoble all that he does. In his works and labours, it will take away those low present ends

* Isaiah, xlix. 4.

which ever haunt and enfeeble self-servers and self-worshippers. In his intercourse with others, it will deliver him from the need of those petty distinctions by which men who live on lower rules seek to mark out for themselves a separate path of holiness. In a high and noble sense, "all things are lawful to him." The arts and knowledge of this world, all its triumphs and its stores,—these he dares to take and to use freely as gifts of his God; as having been made free of creation; as knowing that all things are sanctified to him. And this gives a glory to all his occupations; whilst it keeps him from sinful exultation in any. There can neither be great nor small in services done to God; His greatness makes all equal. Whether he be ruling an empire, or ministering to a beggar, what matters it, if he is ministering as God's freedman? He knows that it is redeemed man's greatest shame to take up with any thing below his Father's approbation—to lose himself in his work. So that here is a provision made for the true dignity and nobleness of his service; of which all

self-service must despoil him, by thrusting him from his place in God's new world, and setting him to work again, like the heathen man of old, as one who knew not, or held not, his rank in the family of God. And this will reach down to the meanest things—to the service even of his body, as well as of his spirit: for that also has been redeemed through the incarnation; that has been already glorified by his oneness with Christ his Master. Now, "whatsoever he does, even if he eats or drinks, he can do all to the glory of God." And this reaches to the most inward parts of his whole being; it does its work upon those secret springs of the will by which the man is moved and governed. The mystic may talk of self-annihilation; but it will be only talk, and unreality. That at which mysticism aims is here in truth. For he that has thoroughly received this blessed knowledge of his restored relation to God his Father, is convinced that God's will is right; and when he feels the rebellion of his own will against God's, he does not need to seek for self-annihilation,—which no one gifted with the great gift of

conscious individuality can in truth seek for, —because he knows that which resists, not to be himself, but the sin within him which is his own truest enemy : and seeking, therefore, for God's aid, he strives only the more earnestly to cast out that which can so taint his will as to make it rebel against his true self as much as against God.

See, then, how much is included in these words : they are indeed the very practical embodying of all Christianity ; they describe that which follows of necessary consequence from a faithful apprehension of that relation to his God to which man has been restored by Christ ; that which is so truly the Christian character, that as far as we have it, and no farther, are we Christians indeed.

Therefore doubtless is it that this principle, which, with all their reachings forth after truth, no other system could supply, is so often and so emphatically enjoined upon us in the New Testament Scriptures. Therefore are we bidden “ to glorify God in our body and our spirit, which are God's :* therefore are we reminded that none of us “ liveth to

* 1 Cor. vi. 20.

himself, and no man dieth to himself; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord;”† because it is the turning-point of a mind truly submitted or not to the service of the Lord our God.

And yet probably many amongst us are even now turning from themselves the practical application of this truth, and secretly purposing to allow, as heretofore, within their hearts, low aims and barren earthly motives, on the plea that “to do all to the glory of God” is an overstrained attempt, except for some few saints of a higher level and a nobler service than the common run of Christians can hope to reach; or, at all events, that it is a species of service which they can hardly render, who, with full hands and busy heads, are just entering upon the throng and bustle of life, at a season and in circumstances unapt for that speculative frame which such a sanctified life must demand. To meet these fatal excuses for conduct which is, in truth, rebellion in God’s world against

† Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

God's will, and therefore the fruitful seed of misery, let us look somewhat farther into the question; for a very little inquiry will shew us the hollowness of these excuses.

What, then, is our life here, as faith reveals it to us? It is the opportunity of performing certain outward actions from certain inward motives, on the necessary condition, that every outward action will strengthen the inward motive from which it springs, and make it tend towards growth into a habit; this tendency, moreover, being accelerated, if its direction be evil, by the corruption of our nature—if good, by the gracious influences of the blessed Spirit of God. Thus, then, the opportunities of outward action offered to each one of us are the seeds of our future character for good or for evil, in time and in eternity; for our whole being is a progression, a part of which is in time, a part in eternity, the whole colour of which must remain fixedly of that hue which here in time it has assumed. Thus, then, this busy opportunity of working, which is made, as we saw, the excuse for not doing

all to God's glory, is, in fact, our special call to do all from this very motive: for he who enters on every day's actions in this spirit, strengthens the upgrowth of this spirit within himself: he who performs them from a worldly spirit makes himself worldly. It is this which will, and must, colour his whole being. The time for that speculation to which he looks for healing will never come; and could not heal him, if it did come. Be the work which is set before him great or small, it matters not. He who is performing the greatest works, as men speak, in a selfish spirit, is by each one increasing in himself selfishness and self-worship; he is contracting his sphere—lowering the tone of his spirit—severing himself more and more in the littleness of his own individuality from God and greatness—degrading himself amongst God's creatures—casting himself out of his own place in God's great world-scheme—making his own littleness, or some paltry, miserable scheme of this earth, instead of God, a centre to himself.

So, too, he whose lot is cast amongst what

men call small things, but who is performing those small things with an eye fixed on God, he is truly raising himself, and sowing seed of promise in God's world-field: every action is raising his inner true moral being, and preparing him for visible greatness in the coming dispensation of realities.

Without this great truth, surely the inequalities of this life would be intolerable to thoughtful men. To see noble spirits borne down in poor men by poverty and want, would be more than we could bear. But this at once redresses all such apparent wrongs; it abolishes all difference of great and small, since the small and great of human measure are shadows and unrealities; and all things alike, according to their use by us, are the seeds of that which is truly and for ever great.

And it is this which constitutes the real evil and curse of worldliness:—it is truly the state of a moral being, who has degraded himself by a course of low-motived actions. Now and then the foul moral deformity of such a state is laid bare even to man's eyes,

by some great outbreak of corruption, which shews how all the deep, and therefore unseen, foundations of morals had been sapped, by what shewed outwardly as such a mild and negative form of evil. But, for the most part, this deformity is not manifested outwardly. For as worldliness, in its very nature, is the exaltation of selfishness, it tends to curb the excesses of those particular appetites which, for the most part, cause outbreaks of sin visible to man's eyes, just in the degree that it thoroughly pervades, and therefore poisons, a character. But the character is not a whit the less thoroughly poisoned: the man has become a confirmed self-worshipper—the meanest and most degrading form of soul-idolatry; and the mildness, therefore, of the evil in its outward indication, only makes it the more dangerous; because it has no outward shew wherewith to alarm its victim. Here, again, is another instance in which the seeming inequalities of this life are redressed; for the higher and the nobler are a man's employments here in this stage of his being,

the greater is his danger of sinking unawares beneath this deadly disease. The poor and the despised may indeed grovel so low, that their whole soul may be fixed on their work, and themselves in it; and even in the lowest actions of life, be engrossed by immediate ends, and become through them self-worshippers. But the danger of those whose calling is higher is infinitely greater. High stations, which fill other men's eyes, and lead to conspicuous actions, are greatly open to this danger. Intellectual pursuits, the improvement of the mind, success in study,—these are still more likely to become ends in themselves, and are therefore still more hazardous.

Most perilous of all are sacred things—the work of the ministry, the service of the sanctuary—because most full of recurring temptations to become objects in themselves, to satisfy the mind by their magnitude and inherent sweetness, and so to become veils between the soul and God; veils splendid indeed and glorious, but therefore all the more dangerous; so that they shut out the

true light of heaven from the soul of man. For here, too, he is lost, if he contemplate himself, his own emotions or his services, instead of God their object ; if he watch the reflection of himself upon the glass, instead of looking steadfastly through it to God.

Who, then, more need this earnest exhortation than ourselves ? who amongst us, so much as those who are the busiest about the greatest things ?—for this temptation waits upon business, and besieges manly souls. The frivolous and the idle fall before less worthy temptation ; this wrestles with the strongest and the best ; it seizes upon those who are able and who are longing to do great things for man ; who are thirsting for knowledge, and spurning under their feet all save that which seems great and real. This subdues them, too, beneath the shadows which they seem to despise. Even in his longing for self-improvement, the man is unawares encouraging the growth of that which must most thoroughly degrade him. For such is man's condition, if he stands alone ; his greatest gifts become his

chief betrayer; his exaltation is his surest downfall. "They who know not that they need a comforter will surely be without the grace of God . . . dum miseriam non sentiunt, non attendunt misericordiam."* He who makes any end short of God the ruling object of his soul is a traitor to the divinity which God has planted within him. To slave in the most menial drudgery, with a heart rising from it to God, is a greater and more worthy service for the true man within, than to rule a universe with a soul which rests in itself. He is truly and indeed the greatest, whose soul with the heartiest and most entire devotion goeth forth out of itself towards the Lord of all: "vere magnus est qui magnam habet charitatem."†

If, then, we have such need of this earnest exhortation, let us spend a few minutes in inquiring how, with God's blessing, we may most hope to fulfil it; to nourish within ourselves this only worthy habit of doing "all to the glory of God."

* St. Bernard. Serm. ad Epiph. i. p. 796.

† Thomas à Kempis.

A few hints only are possible ; amongst which take this first, — that you strive to possess your souls with a higher estimation of the will of God. As self-worship is in truth your danger, bring yourself into the presence of Jehovah, and the idol of man's majesty must fall before Him. Imprint upon your very soul the infinite greatness of God's service ; that it must be done by every creature in this world, reluctantly or freely, in earth, in heaven, or hell. That what you do for Him, He does through you, "quod fit a te, Ipse facit in te ;"* that when you pray, "thy will be done," you ask, in truth, but that you may do it willingly ; for by you it must be done, "fiet enim voluntas Dei in te, etsi non fit a te."†

Then, secondly, to this reverence for God's will add this, — that you strive to realise your true position in this world, as one whom Christ hath redeemed. See yourself in Him. Let not sin and fear, or false humility, sever you from this ; cling to this, your relation unto God in Christ ; see that

* St. Aug. Serm. 65, p. 325.

† Id., ib.

it rests on God's acts, not on yours; that it is to be the ground of affection and obedience, not obedience or affection the ground of it. For without this, God's majesty and might must be to us a continual terror. His will cannot be the will of a Father, unless we so look unto Him. If this sight of God, as brought nigh to us in Christ, be but dimmed and clouded over, it will rob us of our power of acting always with a single eye fixed upon His glory; for it will turn the approving face of a most loving Father into the terrible countenance of a most severe Judge. But looking thus to Him will throw a new and heavenly light on all around us; every common incident of life will glow with it. In the natural relation, for example, of child or brother, we shall see His appointment; we shall see a whole provision of powers, which from infancy, and before reason dawned, have, through the affections, been fitting us to realise what heavenly affections were; have been drawing us out of self-aims and self-worship, whilst we knew it not; teaching us to act

for others ; to let affection grow out of relationship ; to give up a proud independency, and rejoice in a humble and affectionate dependence upon others ; and so to make us more able to rejoice in the true Brother of our souls, and go out of our selfish littleness to love and serve the great and eternal Father.

We may trace most strikingly, on every side, this connexion between a sense of relationship to God, and a humble and affectionate discharge of family engagements. We may see it in the difference between the family life of Judea, and that of every pagan state ; we may trace it in the marked moral superiority of early Rome to Greece, —those five hundred years in which divorce was a thing yet unheard of, and the appointments of the family life were still preserved, being those also, in which we see in Roman mythology a straining after the paternal character in God : the Ζεύς of Greece becomes the Zeu Pater, the Bacchus the Liber Pater of Rome. And it would not be a hard matter to trace out this same fact in

modern times; the history of social life in France and England might alone establish it. So, too, in every other appointment of our lives. All have this hidden power within them, which, if we will, we may draw out. So that a right sense of our condition as redeemed men is most closely wedded to a due esteem for relative duties; and it, too, acts again on them; for each one is exalted out of a mere earthly bond, or even an unreal symbol of eternal things, into real and true parts of our whole being and advancement. For this is God's own witness: "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new: and all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ."*

And then, lastly, and as springing out of this by natural connexion, take, as the third rule, that you strive, as far as may be, to sanctify every act and undertaking by a special reference to this, your heavenly Father. Every separate act, indeed, of the

* 2 Cor. v. 17.

life cannot, by a conscious operation of the soul, be thus offered up to God; and as the habit becomes more dominant and usual, the consciousness of its separate acts must become less specific. But as a general rule, offer up your acts to God. And this will best and most truly be done, as by a direct reference in thought to Him when possible, so at other times by those more solemn and stated services of self-dedication and communion with Him to which you are invited in the worship of the Christian Church. Though you may not store your manna, God will grant you day by day a daily portion. Let the dews of early prayer consecrate the morning's study, and the day's obedience. Let the service of the chapel fit you for the service of the lecture-room. Let the weekly communion sanctify the opening of the week. Well and wisely, brethren, did our holy ancestors lay these deep and sacred foundations of human learning and advancement; well did they know the blessedness of mingling prayer with study—of opening every separate period of

our lives with separate devotions ; of arming us in morning prayer for that day's trial ; cooling by the evening service the fevered and heated mind ; beginning a term of study by solemn prayers and the blessed eucharist : that so we might learn to sanctify every day unto the Lord ; to walk before Him in a continual feast ; that our souls might be open to the healing influences of His most Holy Spirit ; and we, earthly as we are, might of His goodness learn this blessed lesson, in all things to look up to Him, and even whilst on this earth, and yet afar from home, " whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the glory of our God."

THE END.



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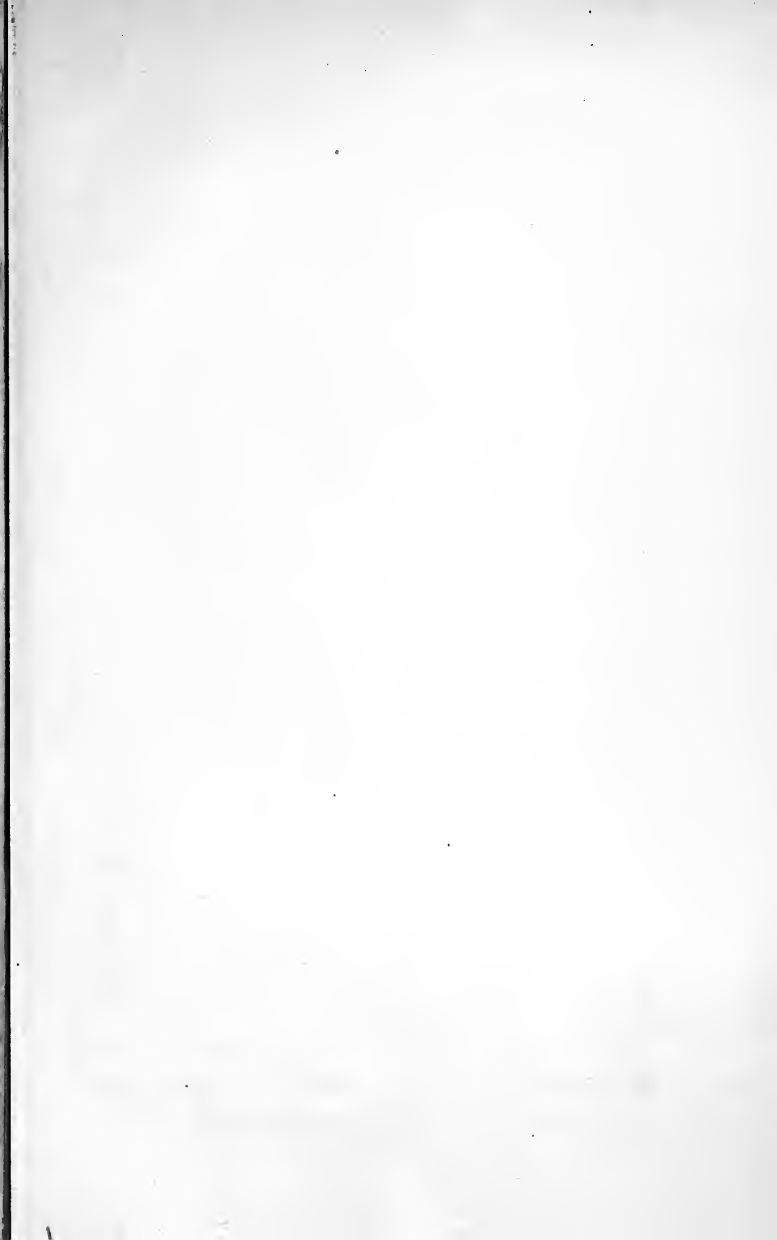
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