



MAKE VENTURES
FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.

A SERMON.

“ EST ALIUS LOCUS QUO TE TRANSFERAM, PRÆCEDAT TE
“ QUOD HABES ; NOLI TIMERE NE PERDAS ; DATOR EGO ERAM ;
“ CUSTOS EGO ERO.”

DICIT HÆC TIBI DOMINUS TUUS ; FIDEM TUAM INTERROGA ;
VIDE SI VELIS ILLI CREDERE.

ST. AUGUSTIN in Ps. xxxviii. (xxxix.) v. 7. (6.)

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THE following Sermon may, by God's blessing, contribute to recall to men's minds a forgotten class of duties. Its author was unwilling to consent to its publication, fearing lest the greatness of the subject should be rather disguised by what (from the nature of the case) could present some of its features only; and that, in outline. A friend, however, happened to know of one case in which God had by it led an individual to make somewhat of a "venture" for Christ's sake, and that, in ignorance, whether the sacrifice involved might not prove very considerable. He therefore urged the publication of the Sermon. It opens a source of high endeavours and striving after perfection, which has of late been left too much out of sight. It contains many hints, which a thoughtful mind may follow out, if it but desire to have the mind of the true disciple of Christ, which would "forsake all and follow Him." It is not hereby suggested, that all should at once attempt great things. Let each attempt what God suggests to each. It is not for us to seek out for ourselves high enterprises: God will give to every man according to the measure of faith—the degree of his past faithfulness. Wherein we fail, is not, in not seeking high things, but in not obeying God's suggestions in such little things, as suit our present measure, and so we forfeit God's promise to them "who have," to real purpose, who employ what is already given them. Leaving exalted sacrifices, then, as a reward given by God to them, who have faithfully obeyed His earlier callings, let us only for the future obey such calls, as He shall give to us, attend to each faint hint that He puts within us, quench it not by self-indulgence,—and we too may hope that "more may be given us;" that higher sacrifices, and so higher glory, and a higher reward from our Redeemer's hands is in store for us, than we dare now to think of.

One occasion is now offered. On hearing of the spiritual starvation of so many hundreds of thousands in London, and its Bishop's plan for their relief, every one's first impulse would be to give something, which would involve a sacrifice, to give "more than" (at our present rate of expenditure) "he could afford:" his second (which is God's suggestion) would be to abridge such expenditure: his third, probably (the result of past habits) to shrink from what might involve trouble and discomfort, and hamper him in some way he knows not of; i. e. he shrinks from making a venture for Christ's sake. Such questions are divisions in the road of life; a man persuades himself that it is almost indifferent which track he should choose: he will find it far from indifferent *to him*, if he propose to make the sacrifice. The two tracks but seldom again rejoin; on each occasion, which God, in His Providence, presents to him, he will, if he fail, continue, probably, on a lower and an unsafer level.

Yet though self-denying alms-giving is one, and perhaps the easiest way of making ventures for Christ's sake, because God has annexed a more immediate joy to it, it is one only; others are hinted at in the Sermon itself; every thing in the nature of a rule, of self-restriction, is such: let no man think any thing too small a matter to begin with; the smallest will be too weighty for himself alone: he will be able to "do all things" (in the end) "through Christ which strengtheneth him."

MATT. XX. 22.

They say unto Him, We are able.

THESE words of the holy Apostles James and John were in reply to a very solemn question addressed to them by their Divine Master. They coveted with a noble ambition, though as yet unpractised in the highest wisdom, untaught in the holiest truth,—they coveted to sit beside Him on His Throne of Glory. They would be content with nothing short of that special gift which He had come to grant to His elect, which He shortly after died to purchase for them, and which He offers to us. They asked the gift of eternal life; and He in answer told them,—not that they should have it, (though for them it was really reserved,) but He reminded them what they *must venture for it*: “Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto Him, We are able.”—Here then a great lesson is impressed upon us, that our duty as Christians lies in this, in making ventures for eternal life without the absolute certainty of success.

Success and a reward everlasting they will have, who persevere unto the end. Doubt we cannot that the ven-

tures of all Christ's servants must be returned to them at the last day with abundant increase. This is a true saying—He returns far more than we lend to Him, and without fail. But I am speaking of individuals, of ourselves one by one. No one among us knows for certain that he himself will persevere; yet every one among us, to give himself even a chance of success at all, must make a venture. As regards individuals, then, it is quite true, that all of us must for certain make ventures for heaven, yet without the certainty of success through them. This, indeed, is the very meaning of the word "venture;" for that is a strange venture which has nothing in it of fear, risk, danger, anxiety, uncertainty. Yes; so it certainly is; and in this consists the excellence and nobleness of *faith*; this is the very reason why *faith* is singled out from other graces, and honoured as the especial token of our justification, that its presence implies that we have the heart to make a venture.

St. Paul sufficiently sets this before us in the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, which opens with a definition of faith, and after that, gives us examples of it, as if to guard against any possibility of mistake. After quoting the text, "the just shall live by faith;" and so showing clearly that he is speaking of what he treats in his Epistle to the Romans as *justifying* faith, he continues, "Now faith is the substance," i. e. the realizing, "of things hoped for, the evidence," i. e. as it has been well explained, the making trial of, "things not seen."

It is in its very essence the making proof of unseen things,—the acting upon the mere prospect of them, as if they really were seen,—the venturing upon them,—the staking present ease, happiness, or other good, upon the chance of the future. And hence in another epistle he says pointedly, “If in this life only we have hope of Christ, we are of all men the most miserable¹.” If the dead are not raised, we have indeed made a most signal miscalculation in the choice of life, and are altogether at fault. And what is true of the main doctrine itself, is true also of our individual interest in it. This he shows us in his epistle to the Hebrews, by the instance of the ancient saints, who thus risked their present happiness for future. Abraham “went out, not knowing whither he went.” He and the rest died “not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” Such was the faith of the Patriarchs: and in the text the youthful Apostles, with an untaught but generous simplicity, lay claim to the same. Little as they knew what they said in its fulness, yet their words were any how expressive of their hidden hearts, prophetic of their future conduct. They say unto Him, “We are able.” They pledged themselves as if unawares, and are caught by One mightier than they, and, as it were, craftily made captive. But, in truth, their unsuspecting pledge was, after all, heartily made, though they knew not what they

¹ 1 Cor. xv.

promised; and so was accepted. “Are ye able to drink of My cup, and be baptized with My baptism?” “They say unto Him, We are able.” He in answer, without promising them heaven, graciously said, “Ye *shall* drink indeed of My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with.”

Our Lord appears to act after the same manner towards St. Peter;—He accepted his offer of service, yet warned him how little he himself understood it. The zealous Apostle wished to follow his Lord at once; but He said, “Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards¹.” At another time, he claimed the promise then made to Him;—He said, “Follow thou Me²;” and at the same time explained it, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not³.”

Such were the ventures made in faith and in uncertainty by Apostles. Our Saviour, in a passage of St. Luke’s Gospel, binds upon us all the necessity of deliberately doing the like—“Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it, begin to mock him, saying, This man

¹ John xiii,

² John xxi.

John xxi.

began to build, and is not able to finish'." And then He presently adds, " So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple ;" preparing us for the utmost. We give up our all to Him; and He is to claim this or that, or grant us somewhat of it for a season, according to His good pleasure. On the other hand, the case of the rich young man, who went away sorrowful, when our Lord bade him give up his all and follow Him, is an instance of one who had *not* faith to make the venture of this world for the next, upon His word.

If then faith be the essence of a Christian life, and if it be what I have now described, it follows that our duty lies in risking upon Christ's word what we have, for what we have not ; and doing so in a noble, generous way, not indeed rashly or lightly, still without knowing accurately what we do, not knowing either what we give up, nor again what we shall gain ; uncertain about our reward, uncertain about our extent of sacrifice, in all respects leaning, waiting upon Him, trusting in Him to fulfil His promise, trusting in Him to enable us to fulfil our own vows, and so in all respects proceeding without carefulness or anxiety about the future.

Now I dare say that what I have said as yet seems plain and unexceptionable to most of those who hear me ; yet surely, when I proceed to draw the practical inference

which immediately follows, there are those who in their secret hearts, if not in open avowal, will draw back. Men allow us Ministers of Christ to proceed in our preaching, while we confine ourselves to general truths, until they see that they themselves are implicated in them, and have to act upon them; and then they suddenly come to a stand; they collect themselves and draw back, and say, "They do not see *this*—or do not admit *that*"—and though they are quite unable to say *why* that should not follow from what they already allow, which we show *must* follow, still they persist in saying, that they do not see that it does follow; and they look about for excuses, and they say we carry things too far, and that we are extravagant, and that we ought to limit and modify what we say, that we do not take into account times and seasons, and the like. This is what they pretend; and well has it been said, "where there is a will, there is a way;" for there is no truth, however overpoweringly clear, but men may escape from it by shutting their eyes; there is no duty, however urgent, but they may find ten thousand good reasons against it, in their own case. And they are sure to say we carry things too far, when we carry them home to themselves.

This sad infirmity of men, called Christians, is exemplified in the subject immediately before us. Who does not at once admit that faith consists in venturing on Christ's word without seeing? Yet in spite of this, may it not be seriously questioned, whether men in general, even those of the better sort, venture any thing upon His truth at all?

Consider for an instant—Let every one who hears me ask himself the question, what stake has *he* in the truth of Christ's promise? How would he be a whit the worse off, supposing, (which is impossible,) but—supposing it to fail? We know what it is to have a stake in any venture of this world. We venture our property in plans which promise a return; in plans which we trust; which we have faith in. What have we ventured for Christ? What have we given to Him on a belief of His promise? The Apostle said, that he and his brethren would be of all men most miserable, if the dead were not raised? Can we in any degree apply this to ourselves? We think, perhaps, at present, we have some hope of heaven—well; *this* we should lose of course; but after all, how should we be worse off as to our *present* condition? A trader, who has embarked some property in a speculation which fails, not only loses his prospect of gain, but somewhat of his own which he ventured with the *hope* of the gain. This is the question—what have *we* ventured? I really fear, when we come to examine, it will be found that there is nothing we resolve, nothing we do, nothing we do not do, nothing we avoid, nothing we choose, nothing we give up, nothing we pursue, which we should not resolve, and do, and not do, and avoid, and choose, and give up, and pursue, if Christ had not died, and heaven were not promised us. I really fear that most men called Christians, whatever they may profess, whatever they may think they feel, whatever warmth and illumination and love they may claim as their own, yet would go on just as they do, neither better nor worse,

if they believed Christianity to be a fable. When young, they indulge their lusts, or at least pursue the world's vanities—as time goes on, they get into a fair way of business, or other mode of making money—then they marry and settle—and their interest coinciding with their duty, they seem to be, and think themselves, respectable and religious men—they grow attached to things as they are—they begin to have a zeal against vice and error—and they follow after peace with all men. Such conduct indeed, as far as it goes, is right and praiseworthy. Only I say, it has not necessarily any thing to do with religion at all; there is nothing in it which is any proof of the presence of religious principle in those who adopt it; there is nothing they would not do still, though they had nothing to gain from it, except what they gain now from it: they do gain something now—they do gratify their present wishes—they are quiet and orderly, because it is their interest and taste to be so—but they *venture* nothing, they risk, they sacrifice, they abandon nothing on the faith of Christ's word.

For instance. St. Barnabas had a property in Cyprus; he gave it up for the poor of Christ. Here is an intelligible sacrifice. He did something he would not have done, unless the Gospel were true. It is plain, if the Gospel turned out a fable, (which God forbid,) but if so, he would have taken his line most unskilfully; he would be in a great mistake; and would have suffered a loss. He would be like a merchant whose vessels were wrecked; or

whose correspondents had failed. Man has confidence in man; he trusts to the credit of his neighbour; but Christians do not risk largely upon their Saviour's word; and this is the one thing they have to do. Christ tells us Himself, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations¹;" i. e. buy an interest in the next world with that wealth which this world uses unrighteously; feed the hungry, clothe the naked, relieve the sick, and it shall turn to "bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not²." Thus alms-deeds, I say, are an intelligible *venture*, and an evidence of faith.

So again the man who, when his prospects in the world are good, gives up the promise of wealth or of eminence, in order to be nearer Christ, to have a place in His temple, to have more opportunity for prayer and praise, he makes a sacrifice.

Or he, who from a noble striving after perfection, puts off the desire of worldly comforts, and is like Daniel or St. Paul, in much labour and business, yet with a solitary heart, he too ventures something upon the certainty of the world to come.

Or he who, after falling into sin, repents in deed as well as in word; puts some yoke upon his shoulder; subjects

¹ Luke xvi.

² Luke xii.

himself to punishment; is severe upon his flesh; denies himself innocent pleasures; or puts himself to public shame—he too shows that his faith is the realizing of things hoped for, the venture upon things not seen.

Or again;—he who only gets himself to pray against those things which the many seek after, and to embrace what the heart naturally shrinks from; he who, when God's will seems to tend towards worldly ill, while he deprecates it, yet prevails on himself to say heartily, “Thy will be done;” he, even, is not without his sacrifice. Or he who, being in prospect of wealth, honestly prays God that he may never be rich;—or he who is in prospect of station, and earnestly prays that he may never have it; or he who has friends or kindred, and acquiesces with an entire heart in their removal while it is yet doubtful, who can say, “Take them away, if it be Thy will; to Thee I give them up, to Thee I commit them,” who is willing to be taken at his word; he too risks somewhat, and is accepted.

Such a one is taken at his word, while he understands not, perhaps, what he says; but he is accepted, as meaning somewhat, and risking much. Generous hearts, like James and John, or Peter, often speak largely and confidently beforehand of what they will do for Christ, not insincerely, yet ignorantly; and for their sincerity's sake they are taken at their word as a reward, though they have yet to learn how serious that word is. “They say unto Him, We are able;”—and the vow is recorded in

heaven. This is the case of all of us at many seasons. First, at Confirmation; when we promise, what was promised for us at Baptism, yet not being able to understand how much we promise, but rather trusting to God gradually to reveal it, and to give us strength according to our day. So again they who enter Holy Orders, promise they know not what, engage themselves they know not how deeply, debar themselves of the world's ways they know not how intimately, find perchance they must cut off from them the right hand, sacrifice the desire of their eyes and the stirring of their hearts at the foot of the cross, while they thought, in their simplicity, they were but choosing the quiet easy life of "plain men dwelling in tents." And so again, in various ways, the circumstances of the times cause men at certain seasons to take this path or that, for religion's sake. They know not whither they are being carried; they see not the end of their course; they know no more than this, that it is right to do what they are now doing; and they hear a whisper within them which assures them, as it did the two holy brothers, that whatever their present conduct involves hereafter, they shall through God's grace be equal to it. Those blessed Apostles said, "We are able;"—and in truth they were enabled to do and suffer as they had said. St. James was given strength to be stedfast unto death, the death of martyrdom; being slain with the sword in Jerusalem. St. John his brother had still more to bear, dying last of the Apostles, as St. James first. He had to bear bereavement, first of his brother, then of the other Apostles.

He had to bear a length of years in loneliness, exile, and weakness. He had to experience the dreariness of being solitary, when those whom he loved had been summoned away. He had to live in his own thoughts without familiar friend, with those only about him who belonged to a younger generation. Of him were demanded by his gracious Lord, as pledges of his faith, all his eye loved and his heart held converse with. He was as a man moving his goods into a far country, who at intervals and by portions sends them before him, till his present abode is well-nigh unfurnished. He sent forward his friends on their journey, and stayed himself behind, that there might be those in heaven to have thoughts of him, to look out for him, and receive him, when his Lord should call. He sent before him, also, other still more voluntary pledges and ventures of his faith—a self-denying walk, a zealous maintenance of the truth, fasting and prayers, labours of love, a virgin life, buffetings from the heathen, persecution, and banishment. Well might so great a Saint say at the end of his life, “Come, Lord Jesus;” as those who are weary of the night, and wait for the morning. All his thoughts, all his contemplations, desires, and hopes were stored in the invisible world; and death, when it came, brought back to him the sight of what he had worshipped, what he had loved, what he had held intercourse with, in years long past away. Then, when again brought into the presence of what he had lost, how would remembrance revive,—and familiar thoughts long buried come to life. Who shall dare to describe the

blessedness of those who find all their pledges safe returned to them, all their ventures abundantly and beyond measure satisfied!

Alas! that we, my Brethren, have not more of this high and unearthly spirit! How is it that we are so contented with things as they are? that we are so willing to be let alone, and to enjoy this life? that we make such excuses, if any one wishes to press on us the necessity of something higher, the duty of bearing the cross, if we would earn the crown of the Lord Jesus Christ?

I repeat it; what are our ventures and risks upon the truth of His word? for He says expressly, “Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first’.”

¹ Matt. xix.

