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THE,
YEAR OF SALVATION.

Words of Life for Every Day.

A BOOK OF HOUSEHOLD DEVOTION.

BY
J. J. VAN OOSTERZEE, D.D.,
PROFESSOR AT UTRECHT.

THE FESTIVAL PORTION OF THE YEAR.

TRANSLATED BY C. SPENCE.

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THE
YEAR OF SALVATION.

ADVENT—FIRST DECEMBER.

'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.'—Ps. xxiv. 7.

THUS has the Christian Church, through successive ages, welcomed the return of the glad Advent time. Since the sixth century, the four Sundays preceding Christmas, Advent Sunday itself included, have been specially observed, so that, about a month previous to the commencement of the civil year, the ecclesiastical one begins by the appointed announcement of the great event which forms the groundwork of the whole scheme of salvation.

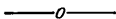
And we too, how is it possible for us to greet this morning of December without an almost involuntary recollection of that which makes this winter month so inexpressibly dear to every Christian heart? Already we have a glimpse of the Saviour's lowly cradle close by the grave of the dying year; and whilst nature cries aloud, 'Lo, the end of all things is at hand,' we perceive at short distance the blessed beginning of all that God in Christ has wrought for the redemption of the world. 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; for, behold, thy King cometh unto thee,' now sounds forth to us from

day to day, and the King Himself, in the lowly guise of a servant, stands at the door of our hearts and knocks. Oh, if the world but knew the renewing influence which He brings, His hands full of blessings for her acceptance; could she but perceive the bounties which the gospel confers, even though despised, surely she would awake from her sleep, and arise and go forth to meet Him!

Yet wherefore should we turn our attention to others? How is it with ourselves, and how in the sight of the Omniscient are we entering upon Advent week? Is all within us yet cold towards Jesus, still silent as the grave, when our hosannas should resound? *To* us He has long since come, but has He really come *for* us and *in* us? That He is sovereign in the region of religious worship, even His enemies will admit; but is He really *our* King in the full import of the word?—King in our heart, then also King in our household and our work, Lord over every region of our life? Is there to us, as to those around Him on the occasion of His entrance to Jerusalem, no more required than this, 'The Lord hath need of it,' and straightway we will devote our possessions to His service? Alas! upon such questionings must not our eyes seek the ground? must we not rejoice in the thought that the King comes hither *first* as our Mediator and not as our Judge? He comes, God be praised, now for our restoration, to reconcile, to strengthen, to console; but first, and most, and best of all, He comes to reign over us as *King*. Well for us that we know that He is meek and lowly of heart, compassionate of our weakness; not beginning with demands, but, out of His fulness, bestowing all that is necessary. Alas! that any single door should remain obstinately closed against Him, even that of the darkest, inmost chamber of our heart, the key of which is scarcely trusted to our dearest earthly friend. He comes to

make all things new; but then nothing must be concealed from Him, nothing must be retained that is adverse to His will, and all within us must unite in reiterating the sentiment of the sweet singer—

‘How must I receive Thee?
 How wilt Thou be met?
 In all things to believe Thee
 Man’s highest joy is set.
 Oh Jesus, Jesus, lead me,
 For Thou alone art Light;
 Enlighten, strengthen, feed me,
 And fit me for God’s sight.’
 —P. GERHARDT.



SECOND DECEMBER.

‘God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us through the Son.’—HEB. i. 1, 2.

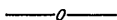
HOW much of what took place, not merely outwardly, but also in the inward region of life, at the grand and beautiful season of the Advent, is presented to the view of intelligent faith by this unique, this first word of the Epistle to the Hebrews! It embraces the whole history of the preparation for the appearance of God’s Son in the flesh, in one single, forcible delineation. God from the earliest times had *spoken*, yet in divers manners; that is to say, through the voice of nature, through revelation, and through every human heart. He *must* say more than all these voices declare, in order that a ray of light may penetrate the night of sin. He *can* say more, because He is the personal, living, omnipotent God, who *thinks* nothing that He does not *will*, and imparts His will to man formed in His image. He *willed* to speak just because

He is a God of mercy; the high and lofty One, yet stooping to the lowest of the fallen. He has done it effectually through evidence, which, however, did not contradict the testimony of His own revelation; but, although not leaving Himself without a witness among the Gentiles, He 'has throughout successive ages' bestowed clearer and more minute insight into His purpose on the *fathers* of Israel. He did it at *sundry times*,—in the shade of paradise, and by the light of the rainbow; in the tent of the patriarchs, and by the burning bush; by the pillar of cloud before the door of the tabernacle of witness, and through the oracle placed in the temple. He spake in *divers* manners,—in dreams and visions, in words and deeds, through signs and wonders, but chiefly *through the prophets*—interpreters of His counsel, and seers of the yet hidden future. What glorious hosts of the venerated forms of ages long gone by pass before our vision on the mention of this word; and what a striking revelation of the manifold wisdom of God, when we compare these 'sundry times and divers manners' with the increasing capacity for knowledge, and how thus, ray by ray, the morning dawns! Yet doubtless, too, the brightest daybreak pales before the lustre of the sun, and poor were the treasures of knowledge vouchsafed to the past ages compared with what we now enjoy. He who had done so much already, did yet more. Lo, it is written, He *has in these last days spoken unto us through His Son*. No longer the shadowy presages of the far-distant future, but the bright blaze of light which marks the fulness of time; no longer the ministry of servants, however honourable, but that of the Son and Heir, who is King over all; no longer a revelation of mercy to others, whose happiness we envy, but to ourselves, to all people to whom the blessing of Israel has come!

Yet once more, what a thought! We have thus in

the Christ of God a *special* revelation; and what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man to conceive, is in Him revealed to all who, really desirous of salvation, have begun to seek after God. This special revelation is at the same time the *highest* revelation of the Father; the deepest thoughts of fatherly love are discovered to us poor sinners in the Son, and even the Holy Ghost can scarcely manifest it to us further. (John xvi. 15.)

But the highest revelation of God is at the same time the *last*. After His admonition, 'Hear ye Him,' He has no more elementary truth to impart to men till it shall be said, 'Lo, He cometh.' Is it possible to believe this without being sensible of the greatness of our privileges, the weight of our responsibility, and therefore, whilst we rejoice, to rejoice with trembling? But this special, this highest, this last revelation of God's love, how is it received by many even of those who protest that they know nothing which they hold more precious? Ah, if no other guilt rested upon us than the lack of real gratitude, that of itself would be sufficient to condemn us before a holy God. Oh Thou who through Thy Son hast spoken of boundless mercy, speak even through Thy Spirit to this heart of life and light, that so Thy greatest gift may not one day testify against me!



THIRD DECEMBER.

'And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said, Where art thou?'--
GEN. iii. 9.

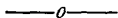
GOD had already in the earliest times manifested Himself unto the world. What is His first word to the first sinner? This is set before us in its sublime simplicity by the mouldy annals of antiquity; but we

cannot receive it as we ought, unless we discover the stamp of truth and divinity impressed upon this earliest page of Scripture. Is it not as undeniable as it is sad? Scarcely is the sense of sin awakened in the heart, banishing repose, till conscience urges the transgressor to conceal himself from Him without whom the heart cannot truly live : the only hope of the sinner is, that the terror-striking voice of God shall be hushed. Unhappy man, such silence would be thy destruction! Nay, when it rustled in the tree-tops of Eden, the word was heard by which God sought for fallen man. 'Adam, where art thou?' It is indeed the question of the righteous *Judge* from whose wrathful eye no leafy tree can shadow. Adam must not imagine that his sin is a light matter in the estimation of Him who claims unqualified obedience. But it is at the same time the voice of the compassionate *Father*, who Himself goes forth in search of the lost one who has strayed from Him, and whose heart is no less penetrated with the misery into which His child has flung himself, than with the guilt of his palpable error. It is, above all, the voice of the compassionate Saviour, who has already in His heart feelings of wrath against this fresh insurgent in His moral kingdom, and is prepared to doom him ; nay, but at the same time to guide the sinner through the darker depths of judgments to the glorious heights of an eternal salvation. 'Adam, where art thou?' It is the first word of God's advent to the world, His salutation of peace before the utterance of the alarming prophecy, 'I will put enmity,'—a word which at the same time may be called the free act of eternal compassion, and whence still, after centuries, the echo still recalls to us this comforting assurance, 'As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the sinner!'

Glorious gospel of salvation! how little do they know you who would set you forth as a lifeless scheme of

incomprehensible truths and impracticable duties ; but how manifestly it appears from your very first proclamation that you have not originated in man's own heart ! Yea, from this point we can perceive an evident design : if the sinner is to be justified, only from God Himself can redemption and continued preservation proceed ; and yet these joyful tidings, that God first loved us, and Himself took the first step towards reconciliation with His guilty creatures, did not issue from the researches of the deepest human intellects, for before the bloom of learning showed itself they stood already written in the sacred records of the most wonderful, and yet at the same time the most despised, race in the world. ' Adam, where art thou ? ' God Himself here first unveils the secret of His tender, fatherly heart, in which the guilty conscience by its own light could have read nothing else than thoughts of vengeance and requital. Nay, verily, ' herein is love, not that we have loved God, but that He has loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ' And the whole of this singular story of the garden of Eden, may it not also in this view be regarded as an eternal history which the voice of God throughout all ages thus declares to countless hearts among all nations ? All of it is again and again repeated in other forms,—temptation and weakness ; disregard of consequences and awakening ; the perplexity of the understanding through the disquietude of the heart ;—but, God be praised, there is repetition also of the soul-thrilling—' Man, sinner, mortal, where art thou ? ' Prepare to meet thy God, who indeed summons thee to judgment, yet only that He may save thee ! All is repeated. Alas ! even the excuse, even the indirect reproach which the first transgressor cast at his Maker. Oh that this last sin may never more be chargeable on us, and that in our eyes it may no longer be terror-striking, but blessed and glorious by such a God to be sought—and found ! His

searching love in quest of us at every turn is indeed our only safety, and to allow ourselves to be found of it the certain road to heaven. 'To-day, then, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'



FOURTH DECEMBER.

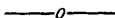
'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.'—GEN. xlix. 18.

IF the light of redemption only appeared in the fulness of the times, what then brightened the darker shadows of life and death throughout the centuries of preparation? The text returns a startling though most satisfactory reply to this demand, exhibiting the calm but steadfast hope of salvation with which a devout patriarch, like many another, both before and after him, laid down his head on his dying pillow. No, although life and immortality were not yet brought to light through the gospel of Christ, all is not therefore dark before the vision of the expiring Jacob. The God of Abraham and of Isaac has, moreover, showed and declared Himself to be his God, and this bond of fellowship, he knows right well, not death itself can sunder. He is the heir of that most precious promise, that in Abraham and in his seed all nations of the earth are to be blessed; and may we not suppose the germ and kernel of all hope of life, the promise given in Eden, not unknown to him nor unremembered? It almost seems to us as though in his blessing to Dan, wherein he describes him as 'a serpent in the path,' the promise of Eden hovered before him, and that thus he spoke with indirect reference to it when he said, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord!' What and how much of this salvation his eyes beheld, how shall we determine? Here, too, as afterwards in the case of Paul, it was as

‘through a glass, darkly,’ that the glory of God was contemplated. But the steadfastness of the patriarch’s hope depended not upon its clearness: it was grounded on God’s promise, and made sure by His truth, shown forth from all eternity. How can we adequately picture the blessedness that fills a soul about to quit its earthly tenement, and lighted up by such a bright sunbeam as this? Here is more than quiet hope, here is full certainty of salvation: here is a waiting, an expectation which can afford to be patient, because it is certain, and can in no case be mistaken. No remorse for the past disturbs him; the sinner has become at once the favoured of God, the soldier of the Lord, the heir of the promise. No suffering henceforth oppresses him; leaning on the top of his staff, he can but adore, but render thanks. No fear of the future concerns him; assured of God’s salvation, his soul is thus set free from everything that might even at the last trouble his peace, and it surrenders all unconditionally with the words, ‘Lo, I die, but God shall be with you,’ and he gathers his feet up into the bed, and falls asleep like a child on the faithful bosom of its mother. Glorious fruits of the hope of salvation in the glimmering twilight of the ancient covenant! If *they* could thus depart who have not seen the promises fulfilled, but merely beholding them from afar have believed and embraced them, what should be the life, what should be at last the death, of those who walk at noon-day, and rejoice in the accomplishment of salvation!

And yet this happy departure, how rare it is! At every turn the intelligence of the death of some of our acquaintance meets us, and we ourselves each day approach more nearly to that way whence we shall not return. Sighs, complaints, tears encounter us on every side from houses of mourning, but where is the re-echo of Jacob’s dying outburst of triumphant gladness? Here, a

silence like that of the grave on what is looked for after death ; there, a feeble spark of hope unable still to break forth into flame ; yonder, again, the struggle of terrible doubt. Indeed, in this our day, the less calm and peace have been experienced through life, the departure is often the more tranquil. Can this proceed from the fact that the prospect beheld by the grey-haired patriarch is dimmed before the vision of many by unbelief and worldliness, and the firm staff of a calm trust in God is thus broken in their hands ? And yet we see here also no light in the night of death but that which is kindled by the fixed hope of God's salvation in Christ Jesus. Well for us that we know this, but especially well for us if, like Jacob, we have grasped it in time, so that in the hour of death we no more let it go ! ' With grasping it shall not pass away when it comes to the grasp ; ' and that grasp, too, which it claims, oh blessed consolation, is God's own gift !



FIFTH DECEMBER.

' He will turn my hand upon the little ones. '—ZECH. xiii. 7.

WHEREVER there are children, this December time is always made a season of festivity among us ; and when evening falls, hearts numberless beat high with the anticipation of the enjoyments prepared for old and young. If this sympathy with the joys of childhood undoubtedly betokens something good, whence comes it that the same heart that shows it can so frequently be hostile to Him who is the tenderest of fathers, who more than His most loving creature is drawn towards the weak and lowly ; nay, in the infinite greatness of His mind, as it transcends our feeble powers, ' He turns His hands upon the little ones ' ? Nothing less than this is His own promise by the mouth of one of His servants, who

paints graphically the blessings of Christ's reign, and most attractively sets forth the pledges of the Advent to all who are in truth the poor in spirit, afterwards declared by Jesus Himself to be blessed. Thus, also, if by the little ones we understand the externally weak in mind, who nevertheless hunger and thirst after righteousness—why arbitrarily separate that which so frequently is closely joined?—to such the Lord of Hosts promised that with special love and care He would search them out, settle and establish them, when the sword should awake against the Great Shepherd, through whose death the sheep should be scattered.

How amazing is this promise of God when we contemplate this hand in its omnipotence, and think at the same time on our own utter insignificance, our deep unworthiness, our woful weakness! We men, indeed, count it much if during one day in the year we condescend to be little with the little ones. God stoops from time to time anew from heaven to bless with special favour the most humble. Verily, in such words as those of our text we recognise Him 'who dwelleth on high, and beholdeth far below the inhabitants of the earth.' Nothing more exalted could we conceive, and yet nothing less doubtful. Nay, this amazing promise is at the same time guaranteed not merely by the faithfulness of God, but stamped by His own mode of action, who is unfailing wisdom. Wherever Christ appeared—at Bethlehem, at Nazareth, in Galilee, in Samaria—the gospel there was preached specially to the poor; the first standard-bearers of this Monarch were fishermen and publicans; His first subjects included not many mighty men, not many rich, not many noble. So it was at Corinth; so it was continually; and still at the present day the Word of the Kingdom wins largest space in the hearts of the sober-minded,—those who, whether dwelling in huts or palaces, are not too great in their

own eyes to seek a place among the lowly,—because God specially turns His hand upon the little ones.

Animating truth!—almost before we are aware how low and lost is our condition, the outstretched hand of God presents itself, at once a token and a pledge of communion, strengthening, and guidance. What need we more than the clear certainty, that He thus turns His hand on us, as evidence that there dwells no longer in His mind the thought of wrath and vengeance against us? In communion with Him conscience becomes pacified; in His strength we can accomplish all things, even the most difficult; under His guidance we go trustingly forward. In the aid which our fellow-men extend to us there is alternately such great hardness and so much weakness, so much unwillingness and distrust, that it is often better to be forsaken of men than to be surrounded by them. But God's faithful, tender hand—oh blessed consolation!—brings a balm to the most painful wound wrought by men's hands, and our littleness and weakness, very far from being a wall of partition between Him and us, brings us, if possible, yet more within His beneficent reach.

May this, which is to us so rich a fountain of consolation, be ever to us also a *sanctifying* thought! We must stoop low ere we can taste the joy of this consoling truth: humility is the foundation of all spiritual blessings, nay, God Himself can build upon no other. But then we must direct ourselves afresh and constantly to this promise of God; for although He may turn His hand upon the little ones, this is not, as some would seem to believe, in order that they should ever remain little and weak, but rather that they may grow in the knowledge and grace of Christ. Let us then show evidently that His hand has not been stretched out to us in vain, and let us in our turn be followers of God, by our care over the little ones that in different forms surround us!

SIXTH DECEMBER.

‘And He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds.’—2 SAM. xxiii. 4.

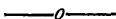
IS a finer image imaginable than that under which the sweet psalmist of Israel describes the day of salvation, which the coming of his great Descendant should prepare for a later generation? If we lacked all other evidence, his last words would place it beyond doubt that ‘the Spirit of the Lord spake by him, and His word was in his tongue.’ Marvellous! how closely the watching for salvation of the hoary David fits in to that of the expiring Jacob, though centuries meantime have intervened! The prospect of sovereignty opened to the tribe of Judah (Gen. xlix. 10) has passed over to the family of Jesse; the promise of a Seed which should sit on his throne for ever had filled the bosom of the man after God’s heart with joy ineffable. Now is the evening of his life at hand; but wherefore lament for this? He goes to meet the night in the prospect of a brighter morning. His swanlike song—as these last words of his may well be called—deserves to be read as a whole (from verses 2–7); but sweetest of all sounds in our ears the simile which represents the blessings of the Advent as the bright sunlight. Behold the clear daybreak in which the cloudless sun calmly and majestically rises in the heavens, whilst the glory of his beams is reflected in the countless raindrops on the tender grass, quickening, and refreshing, and fertilizing! That is the emblem of the blessing of the Advent, in which not merely Israel but all mankind shall have part, when He comes ‘that ruleth over men,’ without any limitation, ‘the Just One, ruling in the fear of God.’ Now we can understand how the royal harper out of the depths of his soul could repeat,

‘ This is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow ! ’

And yet, what is even the brightest expectation compared with the fulfilment ; what the highest ideal beside the astounding reality which the gospel shows us ? Well might our Saviour exclaim, ‘ Blessed are your eyes, for they see ; and your ears, for they hear. ’ As in a clear mirror, the words of David bring before us the King, the blessing, and the final triumph of God’s sovereignty. Yea, verily, this King is ruler in the full force of the word, and the old legend does not thus amaze us, that on His entering the judgment-hall of Pilate the eagles on the Roman banner bowed before Him in humble reverence. Wherever He comes, He reigns over the hearts and minds of His people, through His word and Spirit ; and no sooner has He taken up His abode in any soul, than there arises to it in the heavens the friendly sun. The blessing which He brings is as great as the brightness which the king of day continually sheds forth in this wide circle. No light without heat, no heat without fruitfulness, but light and life, growth and fertility, truth and clearness, courage in life and comfort in death, the rising of this Sun brings from on high to all who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

The darkness may indeed endure for a time, but the final triumph of God’s kingdom is as little doubtful as that of the mid-day sun over the clouds which would obscure his glory. David’s anticipations are already fulfilled, and shall yet further be realized ; as profitless and injurious plants, all obstinate foes of this Royal Prince shall be rooted out, and the final resistance be in vain before the triumphant kingdom of peace. Is it possible to believe this without being constrained to kneel before the God of David, who has thus fulfilled His promise, and given us to see what prophets and kings desired to see and were not able ? Alas if there

should be among us any who refuse to believe on the Son of David, and who prefer to remain in their own darkness rather than walk in the cheering beams of the Light of the world! 'Yet a little while is the light with you.' In the last month of the year this word has heightened significance. 'Walk while ye have the light, that the darkness surprise you not; for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.' He who through God's grace perceives the light, desires, moreover, in the hope of David to persevere, to combat, to die; and the great prayer, 'More light,' upon the way to the cradle of the Lord, to the grave of the petitioner, will daily be renewed.



SEVENTH DECEMBER.

'And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.'—LUKE xxi. 27.

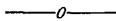
MARANATHA—Jesus comes! Thus has the faithful Church exclaimed in joy through centuries, both to the believing and the unbelieving world; yet it is very generally received that this word applies only to His coming in the flesh in the times of Israel, or to His coming to the hearts of His followers. Nevertheless, to His last coming—His coming in glory—this word throughout all ages calls our thoughts; and, even with regard to our spiritual life, would it not stand better with us if it were less forgotten that He, so long predicted and waited for, 'shall once more come to judge the quick and the dead'? We profess at least to believe this, and our Lord has taken due care that His people shall be warned and ready for this great event. His exalted and explicit declaration regarding His glorious coming to judgment is naturally a thorn in the flesh to unbelief. Where this is relatively moderate,

such an expectation is denounced in one stroke of the pen as illegitimate and incredible ; where it is reckless, it declares the person who holds or utters such anticipation to be a raving fanatic. But faith maintains upon good grounds that this assurance of the Incarnate Word is as indubitable as any other, and clings to the belief that at the close of centuries the King shall once again appear on earth in glory, as before He showed Himself in the humble guise of a servant. The questions which here arise no angel could resolve ; but this stands irrefragable—the promise of His coming is *certain*. It is guaranteed by the power, the majesty, the faithfulness of God, who never leaves His promise unfulfilled. The nature of God's kingdom demands nothing less than such a revelation in glory, and the tokens named by the Master Himself already here and there bear testimony that the bough of the fig-tree is tender, and puts forth leaves. The hour of this second coming, on the other hand, is *uncertain*. There is no emblem of it which so frequently recurs as that of the thief in the night ; but even the delay of the promise gives no ground for false security, since we know that to us the day of the Lord is that of our departure from this world. Enough, His coming is inevitable for individuals and for all, for friends and foes, for time and for eternity. Oh, day of glory, when at last the veil shall be removed, and when the King shall be beheld in His full beauty by all such as love Him with a pure heart fervently ! But yet, oh day of consternation and remorse, when all hidden things shall be revealed, all different fates decided, all doing and all leaving undone closed for eternity !

In what relation does the Lord desire that we should place ourselves to that great day ? He does not desire that we should be impatient in our anticipations of it. To bear a little more is now but a trifling addition to past suffering, whilst the great point in which all shall at

last be absorbed advances steadily. Still less is it His will that we compute the period of His advent. All computations, however subtle and ingenious, have hitherto failed, and will continue to do so. Least of all does He desire that we should await His coming with disquietude and fear. Unbelief may tremble when its sentence is pronounced, but faith must rejoice. 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him; He comes to save us.'

But, on the other hand, what are the instruments through which the Christian can anticipate the coming of his Lord? It is by the observant eye, that discerns the signs of the times, and in every new revelation of the glory of Jesus perceives a pledge and presage of the last and the most beautiful. It is by the uplifted head, just as those signs commence, at which the worldling trembles, but wherein the Christian discerns the beginning of the end. It is, above all, by the prudent heart, which the Lord recommended to His disciples,—a heart which will not be overwhelmed by the excesses and anxieties of the world, that that day should come upon them unawares. Never disquieted, but ready at all times, keeping in view the one thing needful, and which shall not be taken away, let us fulfil the mighty word deeply graven on our souls: 'Watch, therefore, at all times, praying that ye may be found worthy to escape the things which shall come to pass, and to *stand* before the Son of man!'



EIGHTH DECEMBER.

'Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.'—2 COR. vi. 2.

WOULD there not assuredly be some evil avoided, and something infinitely higher attained, than we can boast, were we more deeply penetrated with a sense of the inestimable preciousness of the day of

grace? The apostle points this out, when in the text he quotes a prophecy of the Old Testament, and applies it in a peculiar manner to the fulness of the times. Now especially, he declares, the Corinthians must take heed that they receive not the grace of God, brought nigh to them through the gospel, in vain; because an opportunity thus to become wise and rich for the kingdom of heaven never returns.

How many things combine just in the present day to make us lay this apostolic warning in all its seriousness to heart and conscience! Earnestly it points us to an *irrevocable past*, in which already so much precious time has been lost, dreamed away, trifled away, sinned away; regarding which so many voices rise to accuse us, whilst we cannot call back one hour of the past, cannot with all our tears wash out one single stain in our life's history. But in friendlier guise, on the other hand, a blessed *to-day* is placed before us, in which again the glad tidings are proclaimed to us, and absolutely nothing left untried to win our hearts to heaven. Yesterday, Jesus stood, it may be, in vain beside you at the door; the day before yesterday in like manner. But oh, the riches of God's long-suffering grace! 'Again He limiteth a certain day, saying, To-day, if ye will hear His voice' (Heb. iv. 7); and throughout this day the portals to His throne are opened wide before our feet, and the invitation to the great feast is repeated: 'Come, for all things are now ready.' Who can tell the riches of blessing which this day of salvation may bring to a soul really hungering and thirsting after righteousness; but, on the other hand, what tongue may express the peril to which that recklessness exposes us, which always counts on years, whilst yet we cannot be sure of an hour? To an *incalculable* to-morrow the words of the apostle point significantly; but a to-morrow of mercy is nowhere promised. 'Boast not thyself of the morrow; for thou

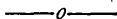
knowest not what a day may bring forth.' How many experiences from our own lives confirm the truth of this declaration, and how excellent the advice of the poet—

'Each present day thy last esteem!'

We know not what shall be on the morrow; we merely know this,—and, though indirectly, it is unequivocally brought to our remembrance in the text,—a *determinate Now* is approaching, in which it shall be said to the sower, 'It is enough,' and to the reaper, 'Put forth now thy sickle!'

Alas! we men are miserable calculators of the intrinsic value of the hours. We barter these away for a jest, for a whim, for a nothing; but, in order to know what hours are worth, we might inquire of many of the dying how many thousands they would give for four and twenty times the value of sixty minutes. In vain,—not even *one* minute more when once the mandate has gone forth that the man shall die; and after death the judgment; and after the judgment an *eternal too late* to such as have not then employed aright the day of grace. An eternal too late! We feel the terror of this thought, but have no boldness, when the lips of truth itself have warned us that within an hour the door will be shut, on our own responsibility to assume that it will re-open at a later period. Well may we, when images of terror such as these arise, with clasped hands implore beseechingly the thoughtless to awake at last out of their slumber, since the sun of their short day already stands high in the heavens; nay, it may be, sinks to the western horizon. Well may we, when on so many sides we hear around us the lullaby, 'Never too late, there is time to wait,' ask ourselves, as in the presence of Omniscience, if we have yet accepted the offer of mercy, and where we should be found if suddenly the day of grace come to an end. At all events, we have to thank Him with humility that He

has prolonged our day of grace, in order that we, 'as workers together with Him,' may now in His service do what possibly we have too long neglected, and, sustained by Himself, win others through His power, beseeching them 'to-day, while it is called to-day!'



NINTH DECEMBER.

'The bruised reed He shall not break, and the smoking flax He shall not quench.'—ISA. xlii. 3.

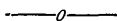
'**WE** have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.' Thus spoke an apostle of the Lord (2 Pet. i. 19); and when should we give more heed to this warning than in these days, in which, as it were, we again live through the ages of waiting for the salvation of God? But if, not without right, Isaiah has been named the king of ancient prophets, undoubtedly it is one of his most beautiful prophecies which here lies before us. What an attractive sketch of the perfected servant of the Lord, His Beloved, in whom His soul delighted! *He* should not resemble the resistless tempest which uproots the mighty oak; but the gentle breath of spring, bringing quickening and refreshment, which breaks not the bruised reed, nor quenches the smoking flax.

In this expression reference is made to the slender fibres of the flax plant, frequently employed in the East as wick to lamps, and no more costly than the thread of which they are formed. Behold, the flax no longer burns, scarcely still smokes, but would lose its last spark were a cold breath to blow on it; yet here the spark is spared and kept alive, as an invaluable treasure. Perhaps the emblem bears reference to the glorious vision

of Elijah on Mount Horeb, and points out to us that God, in the fulness of the times, should not manifest His nearness to His people in the tempest, the earthquake, or the thunder-storm, but in the whispers of a still, small voice. Certainly, it is scarcely possible that the attractiveness of Christ's appearance on earth could be more justly and more strikingly depicted than it has here been done by the fifth evangelist. Yea, verily, such was He, the Son of God and of man, that without vaunt He could say of Himself, that He was meek and lowly of heart. Thus we see Him, under the old dispensation, oppressed, yet causing not His voice to be heard in the streets, but in calm, hidden majesty, for all the good, but more especially for the bowed down and weak among them, saving, excusing, condescending to each one in his special need. Where He discovers even the slightest trace of longing after spiritual blessing, after faith, a higher life, unnoticeable to the eye as the thin wreath of smoke of the scarce glowing flax, it seems as if He feared to quench it, and with coaxing, but yet powerful breath, He fans it to a mighty flame. The man Moses is declared to have been meeker than all the men that were upon the earth (Ex. xii. 3); but what is even this character compared with the meekness of our Lord?

Such was He; and we feel at the same time such *must* He be, if He were to be indeed the highest revelation of God, and the perfect Saviour of the world. For what is the essence of God's being but love—saving, condescending, compassionate love? and He who was to be the Saviour in every circumstance of need, how could He have been able to will and to do, had His long-suffering but for one moment fallen short of so much sin and ingratitude? Take from the Lord this crown, and He is no longer the perfect Guide, the merciful High Priest, the magnanimous Sovereign of God's kingdom; for hath He not Himself said that the meek shall inherit the earth?

But just as such He continues to be the object of our willing confidence, the exalted pattern for our reverential imitation. There is nothing to terrify, but constantly the more to attract us, the more we observe Him. How should we ever excuse ourselves if we turned away from so much love? Too weak to have *His* aid and countenance, the faintest spark of genuine desire after salvation cannot be: nothing in us shall be quenched by Him, except the impure glow which comes not down from heaven. Only let us beware that we do not misapply a word which is designed for our encouragement; for though the bruised reed is not broken, nor the smoking flax quenched, this is not in order that they should ever remain sickly and weak. The Lord spares the weak, but only in order powerfully to strengthen them. He has compassion, but we must not be tender towards our own shortcomings. Scrupulous as regards ourselves, but, after His example, gentle and forbearing towards others—alas! where find we such conjunction? Gentleness is in the long run the highest power in the life of the Christian—that which finally wins all men. Why is it then, although so much admired in Christ, so little followed by His people?



TENTH DECEMBER.

‘I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.’—ISA. xlv. 22.

THE blotting out of transgression, we can well perceive, was to Israel not merely a great necessity, but the very greatest, which must be satisfied before there could be further question of the enjoyment of God’s favour in the time to come. But is the promise of salvation given therein as indispensable for each one of us? and can we really remain at rest, nay, can there be earnest

endeavour after renewal and sanctification, so long as God Himself has not repeated this great word unto our souls? Our sins,—what stands there written in the book of God's remembrance regarding us, and where shall we hide ourselves if the Holy One will enter into judgment with us? Even in the midst of earthly prosperity ye have but too frequently little real enjoyment, my fellow-sinners. I will tell you why. Just as often on a wintry day the mist makes all without look grey, and dim, and gloomy, so does the sense of sin, when unconfessed and unforgiven, spread a veil as of sombre crape before your vision, over the whole of life, external and internal. As little as the mist can disperse itself, even less can you remove the burden of guilt from your own shoulders; and darkened as the sunbeams seen through the clouds become, so to you is the light of God's countenance concealed, because conscience admonishes you that you live under favour of His long-suffering; yea, but not in the joy of perfect reconciliation with Him. 'Your iniquities have separated between you and your God; and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.' Thus the black cloud becomes at last an immovable wall of division. Oh, who can cast this down? is the involuntary cry of the heart that knows, right well, that without restored communion there can be no lasting peace. Who can cast this down? On this side, none; but, God be praised, beyond the thick, black cloud, upon the farther side, even this can be accomplished. 'I blot out your transgressions:' thus speaks the voice of Him with whom we have to do, and, lo, the sun of His grace in Christ rises above us, as it were, afresh, and soon disperses the clouds of our iniquities, and the quickening breath of the Holy Spirit breathes through the atmosphere of our spiritual life, and the wall of division melts like a mist wreath lost in space. Long there hung, often invisible to others,

but the more sensible to ourselves, a cloud heavy as lead over our hearts, our brows, over our horizon, over our graves, on which no sunbeam hovers. 'Nay, this shall last no longer!' Thus speaks to us a voice behind the cloud, and straightway, even as from the eternal light, comes forth to us Christ, full of tender mercy, no sentence, but a pardon in His hand, and, as the good divine has well expressed it, 'When the servant who owed so much unto his Lord falls at His feet, God deals with him in kingly fashion, forgiving the debt of ten thousand talents.' Oh, what deliverance for the heart, at least, that has really felt the pressure of this cloud, that has proved how vain the struggle to disperse it!

And this great salvation God bestows exclusively for His own name's sake (Isa. xliii. 25), moved to mercy solely of Himself, as He also declares to Israel, 'Ye have sold yourselves for nought, and ye shall be redeemed without money.' He says Himself, not merely, 'Return unto me, that *I may* redeem thee,' but, 'Return unto me, for *I have* redeemed thee.' The redemption is already on His side an accomplished fact, and on ours nothing more is asked than a penitent, believing, grateful return, in which the blessings vouchsafed are firmly grasped with both soiled hands, and thenceforth all the life received anew is dedicated a thank-offering to the great Giver. Who would rather live under a cloud than in the pleasant, undimmed sunshine? But who also, that has ever felt the power of God's word, nay, of this *deed* of love unspeakable, does not join in the triumphant song of the prophet, 'Sing, O ye heavens: shout, ye lower parts of the earth; for the Lord hath done it'? And what He says He never recalls, and what He begins He will gloriously complete. Yet once more praise ye His glorious name!

ELEVENTH DECEMBER.

‘He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them.’—ISA. xlix. 10.

THIS was, indeed, an *indispensable* promise, when first given to the ransomed exiles on their return from Babylon, and to which we here find the prophet alluding. But this same promise of God on the way home,—for thus should we interpret the words of the text,—is it not as necessary to us, when through Christ we are delivered from a worse house of bondage than that of Babylon, and are called to the liberty and the glory of God’s children? Yet a guidance such as is here promised must be renewed to us from time to time, because the more highly developed spiritual life becomes, during each period, a life of struggle. Although we have the firm staff in the one hand, the other must step by step be grasped by the great Guide, if we are not to stumble or to fall; even although the direction is the right one, the traveller is apt to mistake; one wrong step in a moment leads astray, and the path, moreover, becomes more difficult the closer we approach the end. I must to the last be guided, nay, borne along, as on the pinions of eternal mercy, or I shall never make my way over the slippery rocks, the dizzy chasms. Thus shall I throughout life still stand in need of guidance, and even frequently of refreshment by the way. But the first quenching of the soul’s thirst has waked a higher craving, and as the believer sees Babylon behind him and Jerusalem in front, he sings, indeed, the song of the Good Shepherd, yet ever with a beating heart.

God be praised, that *we*, too, know the *unfailing* promise of the Most High, which to us also, in as far as we believe, must guarantee the absolute certainty of what we least of all could lack. For us, if possible, still

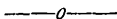
more than once for Israel, is this word true and faithful : 'They shall not hunger nor thirst ; neither shall the heat nor the sun smite them : for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them.' Or know we not Him, the only Shepherd, who shall bring forth the people of God, and concerning whom all that are His bear witness : 'He leadeth me by the still waters, He restoreth my soul : He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake' ?

But can we expect such guidance and refreshing from any but a God and Father, who, with His Son, not merely will give us all things, but who has already in Him given us all things needful to life and immortality ? Nay, does not each believer bear within himself the consciousness of an inheritance of life, in which God has fulfilled His glorious word beyond all power of thought or utterance ? Can we conceive that He could ever be ought else than benefactor, guide, and source of life to those whom now in Christ He has beheld and loved with an eternal love ?

Oh sacred pledge of God, in which each word is priceless, pointing to a gain unspeakable ! To be guided, and that by Him, the merciful,—to be guided gently by the springs of water,—nay, what could give more joy and solace ? The benignant Guide chooses the way, and that way is the best ; opens the path, but always so that it shall lead us homewards ; makes the path easier, yet not by just removing every stumbling-block, rather by making these the steps by which to climb to heaven. Gently 'He shall lead them,' not hastily, not distractedly. Progress is sought, yet breathing time allowed,—breathing time, not merely when beside the full, swollen stream, but even by the springs, where the water is clearest, the refreshing most alluring. We are satisfied when we may draw water out of the living stream. God leads His

people close by the eternal fountain of salvation. Such a promise, we perceive, points evidently to that better land, where first these words are perfectly fulfilled: 'They shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more.'

Yet even here below there is a joy attainable by us, yea, by the least of us, if only we belong to that blest Israel, that accepts God's guidance now from Babylon to Zion, and that takes moreover, and unconditionally, that refreshment which He vouchsafes. Not 'a guide shall be given thee,' not 'they who know the road shall aid thee,' but '*He that hath mercy shall lead thee,*' is the promise of the Lord to us; whilst, on the other hand, He claims unqualified obedience. To be guided, and at the same time to choose our own path,—to drink at once from the living springs of salvation and from the muddy rills of sin,—we feel immediately that such conjunctions cannot be. Let no one, then, persist a moment longer in the vain effort!



TWELFTH DECEMBER.

'For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'—ISA. lvii. 15.

BUT will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have built!' Thus once exclaimed Solomon, when, at the dedication of the temple, he sank beneath the astounding fact of God's great majesty, compared with the insignificance, the nothingness, of earthly splendour. May we not in a certain sense take for reply to this demand, that glorious word spoken by the prophet in regard to God's good pleasure in the bowed

down, the truly humbled sinner? There is to the attentive ear something in the declaration at once so sublime and glorious, and yet so comforting and so appropriate, that it deserves that we should listen to it on bended knees, although it cannot possibly be explained and paraphrased in many words. Thus much we can at once perceive: *nothing higher can possibly be imagined*. The *Most High*, whose majesty fills heaven and earth: the *Lofty One*, exalted at once above all the littleness and greatness of His creatures: the *Eternal*, who was when no creature existed, and shall be when the glory of creation has passed away: the *Holy One*, before whom the sinner as such is condemned—this God not merely coming and speaking, but *dwelling*, whilst He reigns in heaven and on earth,—and on earth in the place which would seem the least appropriate for Him, with the sinner,—the sinner, however, that is of a contrite and humble spirit!

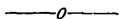
Yet, however astounding the representation may be, it is nevertheless indubitable: *nothing less can possibly be looked for*. Is He not the God of the spirits of all flesh, and the Father of all mercy? Does not the highest love just in this become evident, that it stoops to the darkest depths? and can we think too highly of this Friend of sinners, who first of all brings forth the sacrifice, then tenders the lost prize? Are we not surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, who declare to us this sublime truth? and is not that which a David, a Manasseh, a Magdalene, a Peter, testify, confirmed to us by the experience of our own lives? Did God ever come so nigh to us, as when we lay before Him bowed down with the weight of our sin and transgression? and does He not whisper to the heart that truly seeks Him, that He is able to bring about His own word in a hundred marvellous ways? A blessed thing for us, however, accomplished by His word and Spirit: at one time by

the cup of the Lord's Supper, not less frequently by the cup of suffering!

Nothing more blessed can possibly be desired, than that this great word may not merely come to us, but in truth may be in us and live in us. Where this occurs, God Himself takes up His abode with us. To dwell in His close neighbourhood, which is no longer terrible to us, but unspeakably elevating and animating, even when we are alone or placed in the most painful circumstances. But to dwell with His quickening *power*, which drives away the death within, causes barrenness to flee hence, and changes weakness into strength, keeping mind and spirit young, nay, making them younger even when the body grows old, till at last its destruction completes the cure, and the dwelling of God with us becomes our eternal dwelling with Him. Glorious gospel! but yet, only to the contrite and broken in spirit. Can there be question that this truth is too little believed and considered?

At least, *nothing of more serious import can possibly be expressed* than what is here declared to us on high authority, that no communion between the Holy One and the proud man can ever find a place, but only with the sinner truly penitent. The higher our heart raises itself, the farther He draws back; the deeper our soul abases itself, the lower the hand of mercy is silently stretched forth towards us. Never have we less to fear, than when we sink ourselves; never more to hope, than when we begin to despair of all save one. 'First, when you have really become nothing, can God make anything of you:' the paradox of Luther remains always true and beautiful, but not so beautiful as this passage from Isaiah. He who in such a passage does not hear the voice of God Himself, is deaf in spiritual matters. And he who through God's grace not merely receives it, but with trembling hand grasps it as the firm staff

of his own support, ever gives thanks anew for it, clings fast to it, pressing forward to the heights which undoubtedly he shall at last attain, though it may well be—only through the depths.



THIRTEENTH DECEMBER.

'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.'

—MARK i. 1-3.

ALREADY in the different modes in which they begin their respective narratives, the characteristics of each of the evangelists are perceptible. Luke, who had carefully examined all that had before been written on the subjects, starts with the grounds upon which rests the historic credibility of his treatise. Matthew and John, both apostles, set out, the one from the earthly, the other from the heavenly descent of the Lord. Mark, again, the disciple and spiritual kinsman of Peter, who, himself converted in the school of the Baptist, usually began his preaching with this baptism,—Mark, immediately on his commencement, unites the labours of John with those of Jesus, nay, makes his Gospel open with the first-named. Thus he at once clearly demonstrates the close connection of the old and new covenants, of prophecy and fulfilment, of law and grace. Without further preparation he transports us to the heart of the land of the Jews, to the other side of Jordan, where the stern prophet appears before us, and strongly moves us. But thus he makes us at once observant of the eternal significance of John's appearance; in other words, that even at the present day the coming of the Lord must be prepared for. Would it not be interesting to consider this, and to search for the

reason of the widely different, but too frequently unfavourable reception of the person and work of the Lord, and the continued need for the preparation of the world for it?

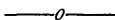
The beginning of the gospel, the voice of the ambassador of repentance; that is to say, through John to Jesus, through disquietude to rest, through the darker depths of contrition to the shining mountain-heights of belief, through the law to the gospel, through the conscience to Him who alone here can cleanse and give peace. Thus was it in the fulness of the times; thus it remained in all following ages; thus is it still at the present day. Various are the modes by which sinners are brought to Jesus, but undoubtedly not one in which the stern form of John the Baptist is not met. No marvel this: the King can never come except the way is opened for Him. The way remains unopened so long as the voice of him who prepares the way has not reached the finest chords of the heart, and awakened that feeling of the need of a Saviour on which an efficacious preaching of the gospel of grace may lay its hold. But now what do we see continually in all forms around us, and not least within ourselves?

There are many who name themselves after Jesus, but yet never lend ear to John. They are Christians by birth and education, by baptism and profession; but personal need of the Lord, as He who must save from the wrath to come, which is otherwise inevitable, is not known to them even by name. Would it not be good for such to sit first at the feet of the wilderness-prophet, who would certainly testify to them on this matter: Begin not to say to yourselves, We have God for our Father, and Christ for our Redeemer; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to form such Christians?

There are others who understand John, without, however, knowing Jesus. They have been at first awakened

from the sleep of insensibility, carelessness, and indifference to the knowledge of themselves and of their deepest requirement, but they still ever lack confidence to go to Him of whom they have already so long stood in need. Are we not almost brought, on account of such disciples, to desire that John would raise his voice, to draw them away from themselves, and to point out to them the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, and also their transgressions?

There are not a few, lastly, who, though through John led on to Jesus, too seldom think of what he urged. Therefore the fervour of their love abates too speedily, because the zeal of conscience has grown weak; therefore the new life too often languishes, because, although they heard indeed the first 'Turn ye' of the great preacher of repentance, they now imagine all thenceforth will go on well, as of itself, without progressive growth in grace. And yet, at every advent, how much reproof the Baptist has to give to each of those who met him once honestly with the question, 'And what shall we do?' So many fresh obstacles, heights and depths, have risen meanwhile upon the way along which the Prince of Peace approaches. John, do thy work with power in all our hearts, before the Lord shall call His own!



FOURTEENTH DECEMBER.

'And John, calling unto him two of his disciples, sent them to Jesus, saying, Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?'—LUKE vii. 19.

HOW had the rock slipped from its firm foundation, so that even John the Baptist for a moment lost the sure footing of faith? The question was answered indirectly by the Lord Himself; thus declaring as positively as possible that the Baptist bore no resemblance

to a reed shaken by the wind of the desert. Nay, here there spoke no tone of unbelief in Jesus as the promised Messiah; for such declension, John had seen, and heard, and felt too much. There simply arose the voice of a dispirited impatience, which, from the standpoint of the imprisoned preacher, is perfectly intelligible—an impatience which could not acquiesce in the still, quiet course so peculiarly the mode of the Lord's working, and felt unanswered questions concerning them hover upon his lips; but yet—and here behold the sure characteristic of honest doubt—he did not go away with his own thoughts concerning Jesus, but to Himself turns for solution of the mystery.

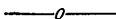
And this inquiry of John suits well the case, not alone of his disciples, but of us also; for has not the great question of the Advent survived through all successive ages, and does it not still exist even in the present day? All that concerns our Christian faith and practice hangs on whether He really was the Messiah promised from the beginning, the Saviour of the world, the Sovereign of God's kingdom,—or was He merely Himself an exalted subject? And so many attacks, from so many quarters, are made on Him and on his gospel,—so many tempests of doubt rage around us, or are awakened in our own bosoms,—that the question now and again becomes at least intelligible, Can it be, after all, conceivable that we, and millions with us, have erred in thus receiving this Jesus as the Christ, the Way, the Truth, the Life, without whom no man can come unto the Father? And even if we are preserved from actual doubt, how often still is the way of the Lord not right in our eyes! How could we sometimes wish that all things relating to His kingdom were differently ordered from what they are; that they went on more rapidly, more prosperously, both in the great world without and the little world within! How many *wherefores* and

alases, in a word, we employ, fruitlessly seeking in ourselves the creature-solution of an infinite mystery!

Happy for us if distress and conflict direct us to the only One who can create light in the darkness! The answer of the Lord remains always the same as then. He gives it with all the calmness and the dignity of one who overlooks and who controls the struggle, and in the full persuasion of His right is assured of certain victory. 'Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard.' We have all known this answer long; but the more we consider it, the more we are struck by its quiet dignity. Even by John the Lord does not allow Himself to be turned aside from His own way. With heavenly simplicity He points to both His words and His works as witnesses to His divine mission; and, indeed, such they are and remain for every one who is only unprejudiced and lends an earnest ear to Him. The works which He does, are at the same time the signs and emblems of His redeeming power. A gospel such as He first declared to the poor, the world had never heard till then; and to the present moment it is vain to desire any other, or better. In the midst of all the contest, thus His words and deeds remain eternally likewise the omens of His future triumph; and there is no single cause of fear for the virtue or triumph of His cause, but so much the more for the soul's rest of those who too soon begin to despair.

Our Lord considers this; and He who always bestows more than men ask, gives not to John alone the friendly but earnest *warning*—'And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.' Blessed on account of the escape which he thus makes from the contest by a simple, well-assured belief; but blessed above all on account of the crown which awaits him when once the earthly prison-house of this body is broken down, the last question of unbelief for ever silenced, the twilight

exchanged for perfect day. 'In that day,' said the Lord, at a later period, 'ye shall ask me nothing.' And therefore will we, as long as this Advent season endures, with its clouds and tempests, study to be silent; to watch, to hope, and prayerfully to make sure that our faith fail not!



FIFTEENTH DECEMBER.

'Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'—MATT. xi. 11.

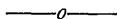
A TESTIMONY concerning the greatness, and at the same time the littleness, of John the Baptist, at all times valuable, is specially so in days in which the eye is more particularly directed towards the morning-star which shone before the rising of the Sun of Righteousness in His full splendour. The greatness of John above all former ambassadors of God, is here declared by the mouth of Truth itself; and however high this eulogy may sound, we know that here nothing too laudatory is said. Indeed, placed as near as possible to the entrance of the new dispensation, and fed by the perfect spirit of law and prophecy, the son of Zacharias was irradiated with clearer light than any of his predecessors. He was privileged with a nobler task, since he it was who prepared the way of the Lord, whilst the others were servants of far lower grade. He was invested, through his mission, with higher honours than any of the earlier ambassadors of God, since it was he who by baptism consecrated the Sovereign of the kingdom of heaven to the great task of His life. Nay, he has attained to purer virtue than we find in any other single instance of God's ancient servants; for whilst the greatest qualities are to be found united in John, with but one exception we shall look in vain for any trace in

him of weakness or of wavering. Indeed, a holy transport seizes us whenever we lose ourselves in the contemplation of a personality like this; and yet the second half of the declaration of Jesus shows us with no less justice the *littleness* of the preacher of repentance compared with those—for so it is distinctly stated—who through faith and patience have become true subjects of God's kingdom. '*The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*' Or if ye really belong to Christ, are ye not irradiated by an infinitely clearer light than the seer who on earth merely beheld the beginning of the life and the works of the Lord? Is the duty of doing honour to God by word and deed in the kingdom of God less to be desired than that of the voice of him who cried in the wilderness? Does not the Lord of this kingdom exalt His own to higher glory than even that of John, who, like Moses, was only 'found faithful in service,' when He calls them His friends and His children? Nay, is not the disciple of Jesus called to a higher virtue than that to which John, by the light of the old dispensation, could attain? Yet why is he then not merely equalled, but even surpassed, by a Paul, a John the apostle, and so many others with them?

No, the great word of the Lord admits of no denial; but how much is there contained in it for our earnest consideration! John was great; but how inestimable the greatness of Him who bears such testimony, and evidently feeling Himself the centre-point of law and prophecy, yet exalts His disciples above the greatest of the prophets! John was great; but what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? Although we stood morally on a par with them, it would be relatively much, and yet certainly too little, for Christians,—such, at least, as not in vain had received the invitation of the Spirit to become the children of God. But how often we stand below them,

so that conscience could not have gainsaid it had the declaration of the Lord been, 'The best in the kingdom of heaven are less than he!' Verily we have cause, not only in presence of Jesus, but also before John, to cast down our eyes. A salutary humiliation for each one of His followers in a greater or less degree is contained in this paradoxical utterance of the Lord; but, at the same time, a not less powerful awakening, joined to the richest consolation.

Once for all, the just measure of determination for all true greatness in the kingdom of God is here given into our hands—*the closer to Jesus, the greater*. Therefore the crown is set on the head of him who prepared the way of the Lord, since he of all the prophets, outwardly and inwardly, stood closest to Jesus. Distant from the Lord, men become small; the closer to Him, the greater are we, not, perhaps, in human vision, but certainly in that of angels; and—this consolation may well suffice to cast a cheerful light upon the gloomiest December day—the most insignificant, the meanest subject in the kingdom of God, has no cause to envy the greatest of the prophets, even for a moment. To be greater, to stand higher, to advance further than even a John the Baptist, what a vocation, what a prospect! God be thanked eternally for His unspeakable gifts to us, gifts greater than even John enjoyed!



SIXTEENTH DECEMBER.

'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God.'—LUKE i. 35.

'CONCEIVED by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.' This article of faith, not less than the rising of the Lord on the third day, is at the present

time, to many, a hindrance and stumbling-block to the true enjoyment of this festival. And should the acknowledgment make us ashamed that even on the first page of the Gospel we read, as though inscribed in giant letters, this word—*mystery*? Assuredly the mystery will astonish or hinder us but little if we indeed believe the gospel as the commencement of a dispensation entirely *new*, and in the Son of Mary acknowledge, in accordance with His word, at once the Son of the Most High and the promised Man from heaven. Every beginning of life, every foundation, are they not, in a certain sense, a mystery? and when should it be more so than here, at the appearance of Him who came to raise mankind from spiritual death, and who, as the second Adam, is the head of a regenerate race?

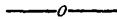
When the Word became flesh, this could be brought about only by a miracle. Those who are offended at the miracle, should deny further all special revelation; nay more, the need or possibility of man's redemption. For, admit these propositions, and the *truth* of the miraculous conception and holy birth of the man-God is placed above all reasonable doubt. It rests not solely on the testimony of Luke or Matthew, though this is worthy of all confidence; but it is silently confirmed, moreover, by all that the Lord and His apostles say concerning His superhuman nature and dignity; whilst His appointment specially as Mediator between God and man shows Him to be an actual man, though, from His birth and onwards, 'holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.' The objections constantly alleged against this miraculous commencement of the miraculous history have been more than once completely answered; and we commiserate deeply the mocking sceptic, to whose sullied mind the angelic purity of the annunciation to Mary suggests an impure thought or image; and for this no part of Scripture, but his own

heart alone, is chargeable. Since simplicity and general agreement may be called the highest evidence of truth, the harmony of this commencement with the progress and conclusion of Christ's appearance upon earth strikes us afresh at every turn, and thus the language of full assurance echoes, 'We have not followed cunningly devised fables.'

What an infinite blessing was then conferred upon the world, in that the human life of Jesus upon earth commenced thus! As one of us, He was born of a woman. Thus, in all points but one, He was made like unto His brethren: born of a woman such as Mary, the royal handmaid of the Lord, the greatest heroine in regard to faith the world has ever seen, and who, above all others, was prepared to watch over a child like to this—one born through the power of the Holy Ghost, so that no single stain or blemish of the flesh could cleave to Him. As the absolute marvel in the history of the world, the beginning of the regeneration, the perfectly pure and sinless One, He stands forth alone before the eye of faith; and thus, when unbelief demands, Could not this goal have been attained by traversing a path entirely different? would not a Christ born in the usual way have stood in a relation nearer to man? it forgets entirely that the question is not this, What is the Christ that seems to us the most desirable and easy of reception? but what is the Christ the gospel shows us as worthy of our confidence? the only One, the All-sufficient. As His Father, we acknowledge only the one true God, and Mary we may designate His mother after the flesh; and this acknowledgment is a new call to thankful adoration of Him who has bestowed on us a Saviour entirely suited to our wants, when, through means purely natural, the miracle must have appeared too great.

But, along with this, the clear perception of our great need and our high destiny presents itself before us.

That which Christ was, must Christians become,—born of the Holy Ghost; regenerated in His society, even to such faith, such humble-minded, pure obedience as the example of the blessed among women shows us. Then for the first time it shall be our own experience, as it once was hers. Blessed are they that believe, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told them from the Lord. ‘But then, too, the miracle of the Lord’s birth no more offends us, since for ourselves we know that with God nothing is impossible.’



SEVENTEENTH DECEMBER.

‘For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.’—ROM. v. 19.

DURING this week of preparation, our eye rests, more than at other times, on the long night which ushered in the brightest of all mornings; and we cannot wonder that the Christian Church, from the earliest times, has set apart a special day before the festival of Christmas, devoted to the memory of Adam and Eve. How could it be possible fully to estimate the value of that which we receive in Christ, till first we know how much we lost in Adam? It is Paul who, more than all the rest of the apostles, has placed these two things in clear contrast, showing thus his intimate acquaintance with the mystery which the gospel has unveiled. Are we accustomed to reckon men by millions? he acknowledges in principle but two, the first and second Adam; and like two different streams issuing respectively from these two sources, each in its own district receiving increase, and swelling onwards in its course, he beholds sin on the one hand, grace on the other, each forcing for itself a path across the vast plains of the world’s history.

Behold Adam as prototype of all our fallen race! Perfectly *universal* is the moral taint which, issuing from him, the head, has permeated the entire body in its magnitude. Without exception, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The link which binds the first sin to all those that follow it is *natural*; the malady which has attacked the tree within its root spreads thence by Nature's unrelenting law to stem and bough, to twig and fruit. *Fatal* beyond expression is the fruit which the first disobedience has produced for millions. Through the offence of one, many, nay, all who have come forth from him, are sinners in the eyes of God and men, earning the inevitable wages of sin, which is, and can be nothing else but death,—death natural and spiritual, for time and for eternity! Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? and where is the ransom by which the unclean may redeem himself or any of his brethren? God be praised, that which was impossible to the law, the Almighty, by His power and wisdom, has achieved in Christ: a new shoot has been engrafted on the diseased stem of fallen humanity. The consequences of the first Adam's sin are not merely expiated and thus eradicated by the second, for the atonement exceeds the guilt. From the old Adam the new could not originate. By what miracle should a degenerate vine produce a branch perfectly sound and capable of bearing fruit?

But from the heaven of purity He descended to this our impure world by His own path. His whole life, and His death too, were no mere destiny, but an achievement of unconditional obedience, which even the hardest trial could not shake; and now, through this obedience, many are made righteous, that is, they are freed from guilt and punishment, and viewed and treated as though righteous. Is not the antagonism as beautiful as in all respects it is most just? As universally as sin and

death have passed from Adam over all his sons, so unre-servedly come grace and life through Christ to all those that are now spiritually brought into relation with Him by faith. As the bond which joins the first is natural, so that in which the last stand to their great Head and to each other must be spiritual. As the fruit borne by the tree of knowledge was fatal to the world, so that which grew upon the tree of life on Golgotha is blessed to millions.

Thus the latter not merely completely balances, as it were, the heavy scale in which the former is; but over and above, the sea of grace now swallows in its depths the stream of evil. The new human nature not only takes the place of the previous one, but, as it were, reconquers it; and the bold saying of the ancient father, 'Blessed sin which brought us such a Saviour,' is fully justified, considered in regard to the issue. First, then, God's scheme will be accomplished when the antagonism which now exists shall be quite dissolved through perfect harmony, and, as Paul so forcibly expresses it, 'that grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Thus all depends on this, whether we are yet only in Adam, or already personally in Christ; not merely in outward relation, but inwardly in Him, united as the bough is to the vine. Oh, our souls, where stand ye now before the eye of the Omniscient? Does God acknowledge you in Christ, because that ye in truth are His through faith? The real answer to such a question is only known above: the glad reply of faith is never contradicted by the life.

EIGHTEENTH DECEMBER.

‘And Jesus came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, “The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.” From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’—MATT. iv. 13-17.

IN a history like that of Christ, nothing can ever be a matter of indifference or quite devoid of interest, even the choice of His abode on earth; because in this is shown His unerring judgment and His tender heart. Yet this choice becomes of greater moment still, since in its execution is displayed the manner of fulfilment of a Messianic prophecy, which deserves to be here read at length (Isaiah ix. 2).

Further than this, the historic fact is interesting to us, since it exhibits such a striking picture of Jesus in His person and His work, so that St. Matthew’s simple narrative may, in its fullest sense, be termed a gospel of the Advent of the Lord.

The *darkness* resting on Capernaum until the day the Saviour came, how it reminds us of that darkness covering the world, which yet is found in every heart where Christ is not, ‘having no hope, and without God in the world!’ The same thing is still apparent here: no natural beauty, no success in trade, no outward happiness can make amends, if, morally considered, there surrounds us a ‘Galilee of the Gentiles.’

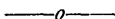
God be praised that none of us need tarry there. The light which dawned on Capernaum as soon as Christ came there, has also shone upon our land; and in so far as we know Him, it makes its way, piercing

into our hearts. Even now the Saviour issues forth upon the ministry He then commenced, to cast out unclean spirits, to comfort the distressed, to heal the sick, to cry aloud 'Talitha Cumi' at the grave of those dead only in trespasses and sins. Is it a marvel that He who brings such light into all darkness should claim from us with right a high return? The *doctrine* which sounded forth in Capernaum when He appeared, was in its essence nowise different from that He teaches still, in every place, to every race of men, to every sinner. To the kingdom of God He invites all whom His gentle voice awakens, to partake of the highest and the holiest that man has need of; and to the sinner thus the way is opened through grace. 'Repent,' He cries continually to every heart and conscience, with earnestness no less unflinching than that of John; but in the same breath He, whom we behold greater than John, adds this encouragement (Mark i. 15), 'The time is fulfilled: repent ye, and believe the gospel.' Belief and repentance, these are the unfailing demands on such as will become the citizens of God's most holy kingdom; and the power even of its King falls short of abating one tittle or iota of this claim. Thus in its fullest meaning, He brings rest to all the weary and the heavy laden, whilst He declares relentless war upon impurity and sin in every form. Is it, moreover, a marvel if we find that the same disposition which prevailed in Capernaum still shows itself, though under different forms, in every age, opposing Him at every turn? Doubtless the Lord found there houses and hearts like those of Peter, of Matthew, and the centurion, who received Him with love and faith; but the majority then as now . . .

Yet we know with what an awe-inspiring 'Woe unto thee' the Lord at last quitted Capernaum; and, before all, we bear in mind how speedily the *retribution* to

which these dreadful words had sealed it, came on the doomed city. Laid waste in war with Rome, it is not now even a heap of ruins; it has been literally annihilated. Travellers of note have sought in vain its relics, as in the case also of Chorazin and Bethsaida, named by the Lord in the same breath. That people, city, house, heart, rejecting Christ, concerning whom so many signs are shown, has doomed itself to ruin, and in its fall cries to us: God does not finally permit His highest gifts to be contemned with impunity.

Oh ye, then, who assent to this as truth, consider, with your hand upon your heart, these serious questions,—Do you really know Him who once entered Capernaum as a stranger? To you, too, He announces Himself afresh: do you receive Him then with love as He would have you? Do you with joy watch for Him; and within your sphere, are you what Capernaum betimes was made, a focus out of which light streamed into a darker region round about? Alas! if this region is so and shall remain so! Capernaum was first exalted to heaven to be cast down to hell: may we from depths soar to eternal heights, whence darkness has fled for ever, and the Light of the World shines in His glory!



NINETEENTH DECEMBER.

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing: but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.—PHILIP. iv. 4-7.

WHAT a delightful passage this, from the most interesting of Paul's epistles, with which the Lord this morning meets us! and most worthy is it,

not merely to be repeated by our lips, but to be written, as it were, upon the tables of our hearts. It treats of what we most desire, yet least can compass for ourselves—of that rejoicing concerning which so much is spoken, yet, alas! so little really felt, but which is here briefly but forcibly set before us under a friendly guise.

How is it characterized? The apostle tells us plainly that on the one side it is a believing, upon the other an enduring joy. *Joy in the Lord*: nay, but without His fellowship there is no real joy; even while the worldlying laughs his heart is aching. But, moreover, this joy is *at all times*—in cloudy, dark, and stormy days, as in the sunshine. Who knew this better than the apostle, who wrote this exhortation while he was in bonds, with the prospect of suffering the death of a martyr?

The difference between joy in the Lord and joy in the world is this: the latter is like the moon, now full, then waning, anon veiled in utter darkness; the former is like the sun raising its shining face undimmed from out the bed of clouds. Glorious disposition of soul for such as hold it in possession, though but in its commencement!

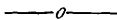
What promotes it? The apostle tells us this when, in close reference to this same exhortation, he warns us: 'Let your moderation be known of all men, and your cares and requirements be known unto the Lord your God.' Moderation! who does not know and prize it too in others?—that amiable virtue, most conspicuous, not seldom, only through its absence, which, bordering on gentleness, courtesy, humility, yet is none of these. In the great world where every prize is contested, it is regarded often as a mere sign of weakness; but genuine Christian moderation may be termed a power, a pure and precious fruit of God's own Spirit, and it may rise to such fruition as to appear in sight of all men, even the least moderate, the means to reach un-

speakable and lasting joy. Then its possessor will lay down all his cares within a place of safety; nay, the safest,—the faithful, loving heart of God our Father,—holding back nought from Him who only can restore us to full joy, when earthly ills, or it may be our sins, have lessened this. Oh there is profound truth in these words of a Christian poet—

Chastened, I kneel that I may rise
On wings that bear me to the skies.

The cares of life may press so heavily, that it may seem easier to die than to rejoice with all our heart. But as this pressure casts us to earth, the angel of supplication meets us; and as humble prayer can never be quite destitute of praise and thanksgiving, we learn in spite of our anxieties, nay, just because of them and through them, to rejoice in God who listens to our cry. The joy was lessened but yet purified by tears, and now it soars on high winged like the dove. What crowns it in the end? On this point, too, the apostle is not silent. It is something greater and more than joy, yea, it is peace with God which passeth understanding, yet keeps the heart and soul in fellowship with Christ. How marvellous and yet how just! The peace of God is too exalted to be fully grasped by human intellect, even when the heart has felt its power; it is, moreover, too deep for its enjoyment to be possible apart from Christ. The angel of peace becomes at the same time the guardian of our most precious treasure—our belief. And all the joy and peace of which our souls are capable, do not these words contain them: *The Lord is at hand?* Yea, verily, He is so to the heart that goeth forth to meet Him: in regeneration He comes to fill our emptiness out of His fulness, whilst the feeling of His nearness makes us able to cast away from us the millstone of care that weighed us down. Oh what could we desire for

others or ourselves higher than this—a joy which shall outlast the Christmas festival, a peace which not even the death-struggle can destroy!



TWENTIETH DECEMBER.

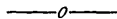
'There standeth One among you whom ye know not.'—JOHN i. 26.

THUS sounded forth one of the Advent notes of him who proclaimed the way of the Lord, after Jesus had already been baptized of him in Jordan, and having just returned victorious from the temptation in the wilderness, was about to commence His public ministry. Did the material vision of the Baptist perceive in the midst of that great multitude, which doubtless pressed around them, some emissary from the Jewish council? Doubly striking in that case must have been the testimony which he then bore to his own littleness and to the Saviour's greatness; yet to us the representation should now be even more striking, since still, within the midst of us, Messiah stands with no more recognition than He had from the Jews upon that memorable day at Bethabara. Alas! it is too true! Jesus stands amongst us, no longer in a servant's humble guise, but as the crowned Sovereign of God's kingdom, who through word and Spirit renews the fashion of the world. Almost every spot around us bears some trace of His most blessed footsteps. In varied tones His loving voice calls to us without ceasing. We cannot realize what this world, what society, what the family circle, would be without Him; and yet how constantly the fact recurs: by many He is not merely ignored, but totally unknown! Nay, verily, many know Him not, this Son of man so holy, yet so compassionate; this loving, perfect Mediator;

this highest gift of God the Father, who is at the same time Himself the Giver of life eternal. 'If thou knewest the gift of God,'—these words, addressed at first to the woman of Samaria, might be repeated at the present day to many who tread literally the gospel under foot, without imagining that thereby they despise the pearl of price. Can it be possible, if men know Jesus however slightly, that they should be so indifferent, so distrustful, so averse to Him; and may not even many a Christian, looking back upon his pilgrimage with all its backslidings, exclaim with Augustine, 'Too late I learnt to prize Thy heavenly beauty, so old and yet so new: I knew Him not'? And thus must even John acknowledge ignorance, when by the light of later revelation he reviewed his earlier acquaintance with Christ; and we who stand in a far lower grade than John, how frequently do we deserve that mortifying question of the Lord: 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet have ye not known me?'

Yes, mortifying truly is such guilty ignorance, above all, when we remember how much the Master has done to make us know Him; and with how little effort to learn, we, and so many with us, pass through the school of love ineffable, which daily opens to us. How many voices have sounded in our ears unceasingly concerning this one Being, all concurring to point Him out to us; yet to how large a number He has remained essentially a stranger,—a subject of doubt and question in the world's history, not the trusted friend upon whose counsel we rely in all important matters! Whence does this proceed,—this ignorance, this indifference, which cannot be denied more than it can be justified? From more than one cause, doubtless; yet above all and specially from this, that men know not themselves, and are entirely blind to their most pressing wants. 'What sayest thou of thyself?' was asked of John scarcely a

moment previous to his utterance of the paradox which we have been considering; and knowing himself well, he had an eye and heart for Christ. Upon the other hand, we, on the question, 'What say ye of others?' are seldom at a loss for a reply, bitter and hard enough most frequently. But to the query, 'What say ye of yourselves?' how many people have no response at all, or, at the best, one that is most unsatisfactory! yet to all, this question is of no less moment than the other, which is so often urged with vehemence, 'What think ye of Christ?' and, what is more, the answers to them both are joined indissolubly. Then, first when we in truth begin to know ourselves, that is, to view ourselves as God beholds us, we shall turn to Christ with a desire that is ineffable, and He, the all too long unknown to us, shall soon become the indispensable and all-sufficient. What rich consolation, that He, so often overlooked, yet stands among us, alike accessible to every one! Oh, ye who feel your need of Him, let now the words of Israel be yours: 'I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me!'



TWENTY-FIRST DECEMBER.

'Clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.'—Ps. xcvi. 2, 11.

THE shortest day in the whole year has in the Christian Church for centuries been set apart, under the title of St. Thomas' Day, to remind us of the apostle who, by his own fault, remained longest of all in darkness; and this incident of unbelief recalls an exhortation suited especially to the dark days: 'Though ye see not, yet believe.' Believe—but what? The

passage in the psalm just read answers the question, and shows us the peculiar relation of light and darkness in the ways of God, and in the heart of each believer.

No *sovereignty of God devoid of cloud* stands in the foreground. Righteousness and judgment are the foundations of God's throne, but He Himself remains for ever to the weak and finite comprehension of mortal man inscrutable. He who sitteth on the throne hath said, 'I dwell in the thick darkness,' and this word is echoed by every voice around us. Mysteries are heaped on mysteries, clouds piled on clouds, not only in the kingdom of nature, but also in that of grace, and, heaviest of all, press like an Alp upon the bowed down spirit. It may be outwardly and inwardly as though the light should never more appear; as if the clouds not merely hid from us the throne of God, but washed it quite away; as if the whole soul would dissolve itself in the despairing cry, '*How long?*' which is four times repeated in another psalm (Ps. xiii. 2, 3).

Nevertheless, the heart need not be so cast down; because *no cloud without the light* is also true. The light is there undoubtedly, although enveloped in a sevenfold veil. It is yet merely veiled, and ever and anon colours the clouds with a resplendent edge of gold or silver. Even the shortest day is still a day, and so the longest night has a fixed limitation, which in no single instance it oversteps by one brief minute. Only, we require to watch for sunbeams, which may prove hard at times, especially for eyes clouded and weeping. Also, when the sun has not arisen, it is not then less needful than before to watch as narrowly as possible the stars by which, even in the dead of night, men may march forward safely, even the stars of God's own promises; and least of all must we forget that the same love and wisdom that created the light for us has formed the darkness too

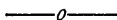
Thus may faith rest satisfied, also, in the darkest day

of the year, or even of life. Undoubtedly there is no *light that brings not joy of heart*. When God, who seemed to us a God afar off, becomes once more a God at hand; when, even in affliction, we can feel the pressure of His hand, and presently behold the light beam on His countenance, we learn, when tried most deeply, to rejoice in God with joy unspeakable and full of glory. It then anew becomes apparent that real joy is not dependent on any outward circumstance of life, but solely on the disposition of the mind; that even the tears of God's own children hide a blessedness not to be found in the world's merry laughter.

No joy, meanwhile, but for the upright in heart. This scarcely needs to be observed, if it were not too frequently forgotten. He whom God permits to dread the smart of pain, and who with double heart wavers between Him and the world, loses the joy of both. Is perfection not to be reached without pure uprightness before the holy God? true joy, moreover, is impossible. Only when the eye is single, does Christ promise that the whole body shall be full of light; and only he that walketh in the day shall run no risk of stumbling. But for the upright in heart *shall light and joy continually increase*, as the beautiful passage in the psalms appointed for to-day impressively assures us. Nay, for the righteous light is *sown*; and that which is sown, though for a time it may be hidden from the eye beneath the ground, must reappear at last, if it has not wilfully been rooted up. It must grow and blossom among the thorns. In the end it brings a harvest of joy and of prosperity unspeakable, immeasurable.

Why are ye then cast down, oh our souls, and why are ye disquieted within us? After the longest night, the sun once more resumes his sway; and just when deepest gloom had sunk upon the world, the Child was born who came to make an end of night for ever. Let

Him be born in you, and from thenceforth the declaration shall hold good of you also: 'The hope of the righteous shall become joy.' The darkness is appointed to flee away, the light to rise higher and ever higher. Oh ye, like Thomas, dull in faith, saith not the Lord even unto you, 'If ye believe, ye shall behold the glory of God'? Now, indeed, ye see a sombre earth, a darker sky; yet, within three days, God grant that from the heart ye may exclaim, 'Hosanna, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!'



TWENTY-SECOND DECEMBER.

'While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.'—GEN. viii. 22.

THE winter, which we reckon begins to-day, itself directs our notice to that remarkable passage of Scripture where first the term is used. It is to be found in the ancient promise of God to Noah, after the flood, when a fresh period of time commenced for earth, and God renewed His covenant with man. No, not a second time will He destroy the world, how high soever sin may mount: in His great heart are thoughts of peace. But if God's spiritual sovereignty is to be fixed on earth, the course of nature, that which serves as the foundation, must first be regulated by sure and certain laws. That which had been disturbed, or wholly stopped, by the great flood was now replaced, and thereupon the Everlasting One swears by His bow in the cloud, that in the kingdoms of nature and of grace He will keep faith.

Thus *Nature*, by the winter season, bears her testimony to God's inviolable truth and faith, since the rule here established has never once been broken. How many ages have passed since Noah lived! yet never

came one year when Nature broke this law. Winter might appear earlier or later, it might last longer or shorter, it might be milder or more severe; but still it came in turn, as certainly as autumn succeeded summer, and as itself gave place to the soft breath of spring. Winter spreads its mantle over the earth, braces the frame of man, summons alternately to labour and to rest, to enjoyment and to privation, to love and to bereavement, even as its thousand predecessors did. But specially it preaches, next to His power and wisdom, the eternal faithfulness of Him who, even throughout His viewless universe, will suffer nought that can disturb or harm.

But this same faithfulness, does it not shine on us in heightened splendour, when we regard it in the region of *Providence*; and is there a winter day so cloudy and so short as not to bring to mind this passage: 'I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed'? So many winters open with doubt and deep anxiety about how they are to be passed, and all throughout their course the sad question is ever present: 'Who will show us any good?' And yet, before the close, it has been surely proved that the same hand which, in the days of old, sent meal and oil enough to feed the widow of Zarephath and her son, is no whit shortened; that which at the first looks grim and threatening, calls forth at last the joyful song of gratitude triumphant: 'Ebenezer, hitherto hath the Lord helped.' In how many houses, in how many hearts, must ever rise afresh the ancient winter psalm (Ps. cxlviii.): 'Praise the Lord from the earth, snow and vapour, stormy wind, fulfilling each His word!'

This faithfulness, to which each winter testifies, how does it, moreover, recall to mind and set before us, at this season more especially, the enduring nature of the kingdom of grace! All God's promises are yea and

amen in Christ, who was promised to the fathers, and in due time appeared; and never yet has one of all the precious hopes which He gave forth fallen, like the transient snowflake, to the ground and perished. Meanwhile, the heart knoweth the season of its winter; yet, ever and anon, the Sun of Grace thaws quite away the crust of ice that bound it, and even in the darkest night of winter the star of Jacob will not disappear before our earnest gaze. On the other hand, God's ancient promise, 'Living waters shall go out from Jerusalem: in summer and in winter it shall be' (Zech. xiv. 8), is now fulfilled in richest measure to every heart that owns the name of Jesus. The stream freezes even less than it dries up, and white as the snow upon the mountains becomes the crimson of our sin, made pure by the eternal love of God in Christ.

How does such faithfulness deserve from us, in fine, other response than cold ingratitude, obstinate scepticism, stubborn disloyalty! How can we magnify enough the love of Him who, in the midst of all our childish and cowardly complaints of winter, sends us the glad tidings of God's good-will to men, and seeks to warm the chill heart through remembrance of a love surpassing all our thoughts and gratitude! May it come to pass that many shall burn in spirit with that glow, powerful though still, which winter frost cannot benumb, since it is kept alive even through the breath of God's most Holy Spirit! Then, doubtless, it will least of all be found to lack increased evidence of love towards our neighbour, for which the winter season gives such ample opportunity. Nay, 'summer and winter Thou hast made, O Lord' (Ps. lxxiv. 17), that man, especially in love, may bear Thy holy image upon earth.

TWENTY-THIRD DECEMBER.

‘And Mary said: My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.’—LUKE i. 46, 47.

WHEN daybreak awakens with the light the voices of the feathered chorus; when the morning hour of the New Dispensation rises; then in the hearts of all who wait for the consolation of Israel, there wells up afresh the new song of desire and hope. The most ancient, but by no means the least delightful, of songs is the *Magnificat*,—as from the Latin term it has been named for centuries,—the hymn of Mary looking forward to the fulfilment of the miracle announced to her by the angel. Who does not peruse it in its harmonious entirety with delight, and marvel at the reverential musing that fills the breast of this most blessed among women? The eye of our imagination widened, sees her stand beside her aged friend Elisabeth: she the chosen bride of the Holy Ghost; she in whom the expectation of all ages was, as it were, personified in highest power, and which is now at last to pass into fulfilment; she the exalted daughter of David, the purest daughter of Eve, the Hannah of the New Testament, but above all, the handmaid of the Lord, to whom it now has come to pass according to His word. How does it appear what then was moving in the depths of that same humble heart too big for utterance, when she bursts forth: My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour? Alternately the power and holiness of God, His mercy, truth, and faithfulness, are thus the burden of her song of praise; and, without doubt, it well beseems her dignity as future mother of the Lord and Saviour of the whole world, that, though beginning about herself, before the close she has lost sight of all her personal privilege,

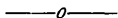
fully engrossed in vaunting that deliverance which the hand of God will now bestow on Israel.

A model of God-glorifying joy,—such is the term that fitly designates this hymn of praise. But is it not, moreover, a picture of the joy, heavenly and pure, which in like manner should inspire us, as many as believe, on the approach of Christmas? Certainly, if we consider well, we shall discover no less abundant cause for it than did the mother of the Lord, in spite of her high privilege. What she still awaited only, we behold fulfilled, in a manner, too, which she could not have imaged. The glory of God's attributes shines forth in the accomplished gospel with a fitness and clearness infinitely beyond what Mary had set forth. And if Christ is really born within our heart, lives and grows there by the power of the Holy Spirit, then, verily, Mary is not the only one who in adoring gratitude can vaunt, 'He who is mighty hath done for me great things.' The nature of genuine Christmas rejoicing is yet constantly the same as that which we see beam through the *Magnificat*. It is a grateful, God-exalting joy, but yet calm and deeply humble, springing from possession of full forgiveness of the greatest guilt and utter worthlessness: a joy born of God, resting on God, and which, however high it rises, how deep soever it flows within the gaugeless fountain of the Word, is yet bestowed by grace.

And its *fruits*, where it has really taken root, are still as choice and as desirable at all times now as they were then. It raised the heart in those days, for the moment, far above all that oppressed it; it awakens and strengthens others, as Mary's visit and her greeting brought welcome and timely restoration to the tried faith of old Elisabeth; it shows forth God's glory in the way that He desires, since never can He be more highly honoured than through the surrender to Him of that confiding heart of man that unconditionally receives His pro-

mises without the inward question, 'How can this thing be?'

Alas, who does not feel with shame the difference between this first Christmas hymn of hope, and so many of the festival hymns of recent composition, which, being destitute of all true spiritual life, are wanting in their essence! How should even the lowliness of Mary, 'her low estate,' console us, if by this we might attain some portion of her humility, her faith, her joy unspeakable, her blessed hope! Assuredly too many lose right thankfulness because they forget right prayer, and generally few rise to Mary's height, because they never began so low as she did. And yet the secret of the true joy of Christmas can be learnt nowhere but in the school of deep humility; and also concerning our own approaching festival, the prophecy is spoken, 'He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away.' First must we be able to speak of the great things which God has done for us in our own personal experience, before we can re-echo from the inmost depths of our exulting heart, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord,' and not until the *spirit* of Mary dwells in us shall we be able to learn the *song* of Mary. What better, then, could we desire both for ourselves and for all dear to us, than that God would make us poor in spirit, so that He may fill us with His riches in Christ Jesus?



TWENTY-FOURTH DECEMBER.

'En the morning ye shall see the glory of the Lord.'—Ex. xvi. 7.

SO spake Moses, the man of God, to Israel, the day before the descent of the manna in the wilderness commenced, and the narrative testifies how marvellously

the word was fulfilled. Can it surprise us that the Christian Church through ages following has reiterated the same word, on Christmas eve ; and is not our heart thrilled with unutterable anticipations of all those things which we shall hear anew ? But who does not immediately, on hearing the word of Moses, think upon the solemn declaration of the Greater than Moses : ‘ I am the living bread that came down from heaven ; ’ and where shines the glory of the Lord in such undimmed lustre, as in the appearance of God’s own Son in the flesh ? Greater than the mighty power which fed an entire people with bread from heaven, is the omnipotence which in Christ creates light in the darkness of this world, and life out of the mists of death. More exalted than that wisdom, which in the wilderness provided in its own way for the necessities of thousands, appears to us the adorable scheme of God as it regards the time, place, manner, and circumstances of the birth of Christ. And all the compassion, the love, the faithfulness, which God, in showers of manna, poured forth on stubborn Israel, what are these compared with all the boundless riches of grace that echo in the words, ‘ good-will to men ’ ? Here every comparison falls short, and more even than the striking conformity, the wide disparity between the bread from heaven and the shower of manna becomes conspicuous. In the case last mentioned, God provided a relief for hunger of the body ; in the first, for satisfying the deepest hunger of the heart. The one is just a revelation of God’s sovereign care over a single nation, the other is the rising of the light of His truth and mercy over the whole world. That is a food that nourishes the body for the time, but does not hinder it from sinking before the power of death ; this, the gift unspeakable of which it can be said with truth, ‘ that this bread shall endure unto eternal life.’

Alas, what were this life of ours if even the greatest

need our souls acknowledge must remain eternally unsatisfied ; and yet what satisfaction could be found for it, had not God Himself sought it and found it in the face of Christ ?

A world without Christ would be a wilderness destitute of manna. A wanderer in such a wilderness is he who knows not his own highest want, or seeks to satisfy it apart from Christ. But what glad news is this for us, that the brightest revelation of God's glory has arisen as a friendly light ; and what a call to await this Christmas-tide with prayerful heart its fresh appearance to us, to grasp it with an earnest faith, and, above all, to make it ours by hearty and unreserved surrender of ourselves to God ! 'Sanctify yourselves on the morrow' (Num. xi. 18). To-day, this summons should echo through each congregation, each family, each heart. Let, then, all turmoil cease, each voice of discord hush, and all the impure leaven be purged out, that ye may celebrate a holy feast to God.

In order truly to contemplate His glory in the manger of Bethlehem, the eye must be quite turned away from viewing vanity ; it must be cleared from worldliness and raised to heaven, whence once, on Christmas eve, came down His richest gift to this poor earth. Moreover, it is not enough that we gaze upwards ; we must long for it, expect, use, keep, and guard God's Christmas gift. How little had it profited Israel if they had subjected the bread of heaven to chemical analysis, and thus made known its rich supply of nutriment, unless they further had fed upon its fulness ! Ah ! should there be so much contention, even within the shadow of the manger, if there were all around more hunger for the food which never perishes, but shall endure unto eternal life !

Well is it, then, for us that there remains another day of preparation. Let it not pass away without a deeper

consciousness of what we should be but for Christ; what in Him we have received, and what through Him we must become. Let Christ, the bread of heaven, be every day more precious to us, and let us watch against that base ingratitude by which Israel despised the manna, when too long their hunger had been satisfied. The Christmas festival must not be to us a mere remembrancer of mercies in times gone by, it must be also a bright *to-day* of joy and blessedness. 'This day is born to you a Saviour:' thus shall the angelic choir sing on the morrow. Then arise our souls, for ye shall see the glory of the Lord beaming upon the fields of Ephrata, never again to set! But think, if you had not beheld this morning's sun, if now your nearest friend had grasped the stiffened hand, ice-cold in death, and had exclaimed, Alas, who would have thought this yesterday! Happy for us that still we hear God's voice of love; but yet, since mercy spares us, 'to-morrow shall be as to-day, and more abundant.' Christians, let your last thought this night, your wakening prayer to-morrow, still be this: 'Show me Thy glory, Lord!' Ye shall not plead in vain; for God has more to show and give to you than even the manna of Israel.

CHRISTMAS DAY—TWENTY-FIFTH
DECEMBER.

‘And she brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room in the inn.’—LUKE ii. 7.

‘Out from the world’s dark cloud,
A light of lights appears;
Lo, to it nations crowd!
My soul, dry now thy tears!
It comes to chase away
The shades of sin and death;
Night now is lost in day,
Winter in Spring’s soft breath.’
—BEETS.

WITH such words on our lips, we may greet one another on this morning of the great festival, and thank God, who has allowed us to see it. The day has now arisen, which has been celebrated more than eighteen hundred times, yet is still as quickening and soul-reviving as ever, still as beautiful; nay, yet more beautiful each year we live, because it brings us more to feel our poverty in self, our riches in Christ Jesus. Now melts in day before our gladdened eyes that night, which is appointed to make an end for ever of all night and darkness!

How are these thoughts increased in earnestness, when we take up the Gospel of St. Luke, in which the evangelist begins the record of God’s new kingdom upon earth, with all the sobriety of an historian, by chronicling the decree of Cæsar Augustus, in whose time, unmarked and silently, this reign commenced! What a distance between the emperor of whom mention is made when the story opens, and the humble babe our text describes! and yet, before that child the lustre of the crown shall

fade, its glory dimmed when brought into comparison with His. Well may we here, if nowhere else, repeat the words of the apostle: 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!' What, before the eye of faith, are all the marvels of creation compared with this, the incarnation that night accomplished at Bethlehem!

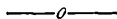
Here we behold with awe and wonder *God's great plan wrought out by man's decree*. The seeming chance caprice of a vain monarch, who desired to know the actual number of his subjects, that he might tell how many owed him tribute and reverence, sent a humble married pair from Nazareth to visit David's city, and thus fulfilled an ancient prophecy, of which Cæsar had never heard. Mary's hour drew near, and from her virgin womb was born a child, of whom the angel said, 'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest.'

There is thus here, in truth, *a mystery unfathomable, of God's working, made manifest in the person of a helpless child*. The Word that was with God, and was God, became flesh and dwelt among us; but not in splendour that dazzled angels' eyes: no, in the softened light which even we can bear, in the lovely, but still familiar, fashion of a babe. He who was in the form of God is found not merely in the guise of man, but, moreover, a holy, glorious, yet poor and helpless child. Rich mothers, have ye thought of this, when ye this morning viewed your happy band of little ones? And thou poor beggar woman, dost there not upon thy lips the murmur of complaint at this strange thought—My need is, after all, not half so great as His, and He is God's own Son, the only-begotten, well-beloved Son? The cause is of God, and far beyond our feeble grasp; but here we may perceive how *His unspeakable gift was found within a*

humble manger. Who can declare the sum of all the thankfulness which mankind—Christendom, society, the state, science and art, the household, but especially the heart of the poor sinner—owe to Him, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption? The history opens thus: ‘And it came to pass in those days!’ What tongue could tell of all implied, what pen describe how much this Advent brought us!

Undoubtedly God’s kingdom, *which shall have no end, is here beheld founding its throne within a humble stall.* Nay, the stream of this salvation can never possibly dry up. It is appointed to slake the thirst of many generations ere it is lost within the ocean of eternity! The Christmas festival is by God designed to be a feast for the whole world, and its triumphal song has ever this refrain: ‘Who is a God like unto Thee, for Thou hast loved the world?’

To Him be glory for ever! Let this word of the apostle sound to-day, and on the morrow also, in our adoring souls! Glory to Him, through a heart that values Him, a tongue warm in His praise, but specially a life of self-denial, faith, and gratitude; such are the proofs that testify how not in vain we kneel beside the stall at Bethlehem!



SECOND DAY OF CHRISTMAS—TWENTY-SIXTH DECEMBER.

‘Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.’—LUKE ii. 15.

‘GLORY to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.’ Yet rings in our ears the echo of this angel-song, and for the second time we

join all Christendom in celebrating this festival of Christ's birthday. But as regards the question, how to make enjoyment of the Christmas blessing lasting, we know no better answer than is given us by a glance at the words and the example of these first listeners to the first Christmas sermon.

In four respects these simple peasants may be called our forerunners and patterns. First of all, their *earnest search* after the Saviour strikes upon our eye. They might have readily excused themselves, if, like so many others, they had lacked deep interest in the matter. But they leave all behind them that might encumber their important search: the hesitation of doubt as to the meaning, the cares of worldliness, the resistance of the flesh. On the other hand, they take with them whatever may make smooth the path: they seek to be enlightened by the star of God's own testimony; to be united by mutual love, the bond of perfectness; to be supported by the staff of firm and stedfast hope. So they all 'come in haste,' and rest not until their feet stand finally within the gate of Bethlehem. Is it marvel, if men go forward thus, that they return, not disappointed? He who with lukewarm mind sets forth, comes not in heart to Bethlehem; that is, he obtains not that which he sought with so little earnestness and longing. But the path of the just is as 'a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.' Anxious seeking leads to certain finding; pressing forward towards salvation ends in the goal of *sure possession*. They 'found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.' What tongue can utter all the glory and the blessedness which these words picture! what pen describe the joy, surprise, and ecstasy that penetrate these pious hearts at such a sight! Nay, they are not offended by the meanness of the surroundings: in the unsightly shell they view the pearl above all price; in

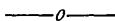
the cloudy present, the first faint rays of light that usher in a glorious future.

But we ourselves, who have been privileged to know so much hidden from these, to see so far beyond them ; who are acquainted not merely with what lies at Bethlehem and Nazareth, but also at Gethsemane, Golgotha, and the Mount of Olives ; shall we in spirit rest by the cradle of the Lord without, in humble and hearty faith, repeating, 'Lo, this is our God: we have waited for Him ; He comes to bless us' ? So long as this point has not been attained, there can be no question of lasting Christmas enjoyment ; because, not the bodily contemplation of the child-Christ Himself, but the spiritual perception of the salvation of the world, and of our own souls in Him, brings us this day in truth before God upon our knees.

Only by following this path can we attain to bear that *determined testimony*, in which these pious shepherds have preceded us. Ah ! if we feel no need—we who both can and may—to speak of those great things that God hath given to us in Christ ; if we, in closest converse, rather testify of all things else, than of Him who is our peace and hope, what does this silence of the tomb betoken but that our hearts are cold as death ? How much more should we serve to God's glory, and prove a blessing to others, if we could oftener, with John and Peter, say, 'We cannot but speak of that which we have seen and heard.' In this the shepherds far excel us, when, in all simplicity, they here step forth as the first sowers in the field of the kingdom of God, and permit themselves to be withheld by nothing from uttering that of which their hearts are full.

Well for us if we can tread their footsteps ! Then shall come to us that *God-glorifying repentance*, which may be called the fairest fruit of this great Christian festival. It cannot come to us unless the first have gone

before it ; but it comes certainly as often as the Christmas gospel, is as clearly manifested, as devoutly listened to, as abundantly blessed, as on the night of Jesus' birth. But is it not with pain that we perceive how much, through our own fault, is lacking? Lord, make atonement for all that is not pure after the similitude of heavenly things!



TWENTY-SEVENTH DECEMBER.

'But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.'—
LUKE ii. 19.

ALREADY, perhaps, in many a heart the Christmas joy begins to wane with the setting sun of the festival. Can this be because, although we have sung with the angels, and in spirit have gone with the shepherds to Bethlehem, we have yet too little listened like Mary, and pondered with a heart like hers? How significant is this declaration concerning the mother of the Lord, when contrasted with the conduct of those whose attention and admiration are but momentary: 'Mary kept these things, and pondered them in her heart.' Who more than she possessed that ornament of a still and quiet mind, which in the sight of God is of great price, and whose eye wearies gazing into these still depths and this deep stillness? We see her there set down, not as the queen of heaven, but as the lowly handmaid of the Lord, to whom it has come to pass according to His word: the thoughtful eye turned now on her child, and then to heaven: not questioning, but waiting for the salvation of her God. All round her is so still, so lonely, and so strange. The struggle of nature is past, but the conflict of faith may return. But behold the shepherds enter in haste, inquiring; and as

they relate the marvels they have witnessed, worship her child ; and the louder they exclaim, the calmer become the thoughts which weigh on that pure mother's heart. No sound escapes her ear. She retains and muses on each word ; she weaves together the loose threads into a marvellous tissue, on which she reads the name of the thrice Holy One. No marvellous coincidence escapes her ; no seeming contradiction makes her stumble ; no key to the past, no gleam of light as to the present, no portent for the future, is lost upon her watchful and observant spirit. And when, more and more clearly, she perceives that her God is near her in the person of her dear child, then her eyes swim in sweetest tears, her bosom swells with heavenly joy, and once more on her lips hovers the song, 'Henceforth all people shall call me blessed ;' and if she does not give it voice a second time, it is because, lost in involuntary worship and meditation, she stoops above the lowly cradle. He who is happy sings, yet joy like hers is silent ; and such silence glorifies God no less than did the praises of shepherds and of angels.

Thus Mary's heart became a treasure-house, wherein the shepherds' words were stored as silver, and where in time to come the sayings of her son and Lord should be laid up as gold. Thus she shines before the eyes of later ages as the type of meditative faith, seated by the cradle of the Lord ; the type of human-kind who first beside this cradle, aroused to higher consciousness of self, and through this marvellous revelation of God's love in Christ, beheld unlocked a treasure inexhaustible for thought and meditation. But thus she, too, becomes from year to year the guide who points the way to Christmas rejoicings, even by her silence warning us, 'To him that hath shall be given. Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it !'

Hearts like to Mary's—deep, calm, pure—resemble

mines which, from their dark recesses, give forth the precious metals ; but the treasure which these first contain is spiritual, and cannot suffer loss by thieves, or tarnishing. In souls like these, not as the shallow, muddy, and troubled brook, but as the broad, unruffled lake, the Sun of Righteousness unclouded views His image mirrored. Is there no ground for thinking that characters like these are growing rarer ; so that for one Mary you now may find ten Marthas, twenty Peters for every John ? Alas ! of all the evils of our times, in which we see the everlasting gospel of the kingdom forsaken or denied by many women, the want of earnestness and depth of thought is not the least. Men speak infinitely more than what they think. Men live by impressions, which at every turning thrust forth each other ; and within the inmost chamber, how much other furniture than Bible and Creed, how seldom the thoughts move in the direction of Mary's choice ! And thence the partiality with which we retain and meditate on that alone that strikes and pleases us, and not, like Mary, on all the words we hear. Thence, too, the secret unbelief which makes us ask so often, How can these things be ? Thence the laying up the things of God within our self-conceited minds, not in our hearts. Ah ! well may we cast down our eyes before the bright example of the blessed Mary, yet raise them also wondering, beseechingly, inquiringly, to contemplate her marvellous child !

‘ We will not quit this child,
Till in our inmost heart
Love, pure and undefiled,
Springs, never to depart !’

—BEETS.

TWENTY-EIGHTH DECEMBER.

'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.'—2 COR. viii. 9.

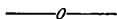
RICHES and poverty. At every turning the fearful contrast comes before us in all its varied forms; and assuredly no man living, who enjoys the first, would freely choose the last for his own portion. Who, then, can picture to us the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, which the apostle here sets forth, to awake within the hearts of the Corinthians a gentle gratitude? and who can fathom the full meaning of his words, in which the essence of the Christmas gospel is summed up?

On the one side, Christ appears in His original riches, and in His self-elected poverty. Let us imagine for a moment the world which we inhabit absent: the drop hangs not to the bucket, the grain of dust to the balance; but in the beginning was the Word which was with God and was God, praised to all eternity. In the Son the Father beholds Himself; His knowledge is God's knowledge, His power God's power, His riches God's riches. If this most glorious Being shall reveal Himself upon this minute speck of His creation, where shall we look for Him? what grandeur shall we expect in His surroundings? Surely least of all at Bethlehem, in the cattle-stall, in the manger; and yet that is but the commencement of a state of humiliation, where every step of the way leads down to the cross, to death, to the grave. Yet this humiliation is not mere destiny, but choice. Only on our account, from nothing else but love, the God-man chooses for Himself that which assuredly each child of man repudiates as the depth of misery.

And now, as the result of this self-humbling of the Lord, may we, on the other side, speak of the Christian in *his original poverty and his incalculable riches*. How poor we were originally, not as men merely, but, above all, as sinners,—who has not felt with shame and pain at one glance within and round him? But, God be praised, grace has herself replaced what sin had lost, and this marvellous word, ‘As having nothing, yet possessing all things,’ comes home to the experience of the believer through his fellowship with Christ. Nay, He took on our poverty, only that He might share His riches with the poorest; and He comes not to receive ought for Himself, but that He may bring us all. Through poverty He honours us; because, by His appearance in human form, humanity is lifted up from the sad depths to which it had sunk down. Through poverty He still maintains us, since, with the robe of His own perfect righteousness, He hides our naked sinfulness from God. Through poverty He meets with us; because His cradle and His cross have power resistless to satisfy the soul longing for peace and safety, far beyond Mount Tabor or Mount Olivet, with all their glory. Through this self-humiliation, unparalleled in history, He—as it is so beautifully said in the communion service—‘took on Himself our curse, that He might fill us with His blessing.’ Yet once again, ‘For God so loved the world!’

‘Ye know the grace,’ writes Paul to the Corinthian converts. Could he say so to each of us? for do not many seem as though they never yet had heard these things, or, if hearing, had quite forgotten them? Here, too, there can be no such thing as knowledge apart from faith. ‘Ye know’—that word is humbling to the best, because his conscience testifies that he so constantly forgets what he has known so long. Yet, at the same time, what an awakening to grateful faith, that this ‘for

your sakes' changes into 'for *mine*'! What an incitement to active love, where faith in this same grace of Jesus fills the heart with pity to our needy brethren! What a spur to following the Lord upon the way of voluntary self-denial, where it concerns the happiness of others! Ah, that there were in us more of the feeling that, just in the deepest self-abasement of love and obedience, true greatness may be found! But then, too, what comfort in this passage of Holy Writ, which shows us poverty and low repute, privation, scorn endured by the great Son of God, and by Him even ennobled! Only let us, whilst we live here below, so act that none can be in doubt whether we know the grace. This knowledge can be gained on earth; but it shall, no doubt, be clearer, viewed not merely by the light, but from the standpoint, too, of heaven. The poverty of Christ and of His people shall then be past for ever, but the riches of both endure throughout eternity.



TWENTY-NINTH DECEMBER.

'Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.'—LUKE ii. 29, 30.

THERE is in history no more lovely picture than that which represents the aged Jacob pressing to his heart his long mourned Joseph, whilst in exulting ecstasy he cries, 'Let me now die, since I have seen thy face.' And yet when we contemplate the good old Simeon, when he received and welcomed the child Christ with a triumphant song of praise, we are forced to exclaim, A greater than Jacob, but, moreover, oh how much greater than Joseph, is here!

What a moment in the life of the calm and unobtrusive servant of the Lord, when the ancient promise was ful-

filled, and the Spirit with unmistakeable certainty declared to him, whom he should find in the court of the temple. Simeon is, as it were, the typical Israelite, who cannot die until he has seen and worshipped the Christ; and there lies a deep meaning in the old legend that he had long been blind, and only regained his lost vision when he came into personal contact with the Light of the World. This, at least, is a truth as incontestable as glorious, preached to us by His history, that the Saviour then born is the light on the way to the grave, and that he alone, but he certainly, can go hence in peace, who in this Saviour has beheld, with the eye of faith, not only God's determined means of salvation, but also the Saviour of his own soul.

He who has done and still is doing this, why should he fear to die, nay, why desire a lengthened pilgrimage on earth? In order to behold things great and glorious? Nay, but what is there below to bear comparison with that which Christ from all eternity prepared on high for those that love His name? Or possibly he fears the hour of reckoning with his Master? Nay, but in the face of the Son belief sees clearly mercy from the Father, and is persuaded that through the blood of the cross there is peace also to the chief of sinners. Or lastly, does he shrink from entering the unknown land that lies before him? Nay, but the eye that gazed on Christ as his Redeemer has already, far above the cradle and the cross, beheld heaven opened, and has got a glimpse into that region of unclouded glory, where all tears are wiped from every eye. To the believer, light arises just when, to the worldlings, day begins to fade. As regards the first, death is escape from evil, the last struggle the entrance into peace, the grave itself only the dark portal of bliss ineffable. Oh how significant are then the words of a well-known unbeliever, 'Although I cannot live the life of a Christian, would I could die his death!'

Thus we see here in the fullest sense of the words the close of life illuminated by the light of Christmas eve. But then the question presses itself with increased seriousness on our hearts and consciences: Can we, who now boast ourselves in the cradle of the Lord, go forward tranquilly to meet the end of the old year, the end of life? Ah! to how many of those who now have joined to sing the song of Simeon's thanksgiving it would not be the tidings of great joy, but rather of despair, should it be told them by a voice inspired, 'This day with thine own eyes thou shalt behold the Lord!' Only on high the truth is known how many that go hence 'in peace,' shall hear upon the other side of Jordan this tremendous sentence: 'Weighed in the balances and found wanting.'

Where are ye of whom it may be said in truth, as it was said of Simeon, 'just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, the Holy Ghost upon them?' and are ye then assured within yourselves, that of these indispensable characteristics not one is wanting? Oh, let none of us deceive ourselves so near the grave of the old year, so near our own, and yet, perhaps, so far from God! Not on the extraordinary experience of Simeon, but on seeing as he saw, doing as he did, believing as he believed, the final destiny of old and young depends. What prevents us from taking the hand of this merciful God, and, thus led to His Christ, why should He not become our own in truth, so that living and dying we should be His? No note of Simeon's song of praise exalts too high the bliss of those who know in whom they have believed. May you, like Simeon, understand the summons, to shine as lights whilst you are in this world, and when the night of death shall come, receive it with calmness, nay, with tranquil joy. The Simeons may depart in peace; here, they have seen the blessedness of Christ; there, they shall share His glory.

THIRTIETH DECEMBER.

'En the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul.'
—Ps. xciv. 19.

HOW much depresses us on this last day but one of the expiring year ; and how much, therefore, we stand in need of a word that may support and refresh us ! Both of these requisites are afforded us in a psalm of unknown origin, of which Luther, not without reason, has testified : it is a prayer of all God's loving children against their persecutors, which may have been prayed by all devout men since the beginning of the world : a word for us of deep significance at the sorrowful close of the year, '*In the multitude of my thoughts within me ;*' but who has not often experienced that the invaluable privilege of being able to think may become only a privilege of pain ? who has not, especially at an important crisis in time or in life, felt himself stormed by thoughts which were fatal to the tranquillity of his mind, but from which he could not possibly free himself ?

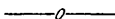
Even along with grateful praise for all the joys of life, arise such thoughts when we already stand about to leave behind some period of life which has passed over swift as a dream, and now a new way must be trod, the course of which is all unknown. How are head and heart fatigued with looking at the world, where all things fade away : upon the guilt which also through the year has so accumulated : on the eternity to which it may be we are even now so near ! What changes have there been within the last twelve months, not only from the evil to the good, but also from bad to worse ! Here, a calculation which seemingly could not be wrong, yet not the less has failed entirely ; there, a friendship or an attachment, which should endure till death, yet has

not lasted for two and fifty weeks. Others have changed to us, and we to others: the world meanwhile passing before our eyes, and we evidently about to leave it for ever. What blows have been struck; what graves dug; what tears, whose bitterness God only knows, have here been shed! And even although no special grief has been our portion, where is the heart that is not called to deeper pain the further it proceeds in life's experience; and who can hear the knell of the expiring year without re-echoing the sentiment, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!' Oh, we can understand how, not the sorrow-smitten heart alone, but the oppressed intellect, may seek a quiet resting-place: in each other's eyes we read the question banished from the lips: 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? why art thou disquieted within me?'

Yet for this also God be praised in double measure! The answer has not been left in doubt: 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me, *Thy comforts delight my soul.*' It is, we observe at once, not merely faith that here gives utterance, but at the same time spiritual experience of life; and where is the man, where, above all, the Christian, who of his own knowledge cannot affirm that God's consolations are never found too few? Nay, verily, so many weary days as we have this year passed, shall never dawn for us again; and even now their sadness disappears when we sum up our painful thoughts, but place them in the light, and view them with the eye of faith. Do we not hear from opening heaven God's loving salutation; and can the weeping eye gaze upon Bethlehem and Golgotha, and never feel the power of the prophetic word to mourning Zion: 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you?' (Isa. lxvi. 13.) Yea, it may be once more with us as in our long past infancy, when a kind mother took her sobbing child upon her lap, and kissed the sorrow from the quivering lips, and made us gladder than we were

before. Our thoughts may be like dagger wounds, but still God's consolations are like balsam drops shed by a gentle hand just on the sorest spots. Not only do they still the pain, but heal the wound; whilst they refresh the weary heart, they raise and give it life; and they will last when all the springs of joy and comfort in this world have failed.

. Where, in conclusion, is the painful thought with which we cannot cope, so long as through God's grace we can declare, 'I have kept the faith,' that is, the faith in Him, the one only God of consolation? Yet let us beware lest we should separate what here is so united, namely, our thoughts and God's solace. This comfort is for all accessible, yet cannot be enjoyed until the heart is upright before God, the eye lifted to Christ, the feet led by the Holy Spirit upon the path to heaven. Oh my soul! shall it be well with thee when He shall search thee, whose eye is a devouring flame?



THIRTY-FIRST DECEMBER.

'I will arise, and go to my father.'—LUKE xv. 18.

BEHOLD once more the last day of the old year, with all its overwhelming crowd of memories, its many warnings, its impressive calls. To every heart it says the same, and yet to each how different, according as each turns the way to light or darkness! But what warnings and necessities flow not to-day into one common stream; and where is the man—above all, where is the Christian—who can close the old year in a better manner than in the words, nay, by the deed, of the prodigal son: 'I will arise, and go unto my father'? Ah, if there be one who, up to the present hour, is un-

concerned about his soul's salvation, and having lived throughout the year without a God, will end it at a distance from Him, how sorrowful is his case, how great his condemnation! All voices round us join to drive us to the throne of grace, and this passage in particular shows us impressively what we must count our highest privilege, and yet our deepest pain; our first necessity, but yet, moreover, our holiest duty.

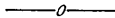
What a *privilege* is ours at the end of a year. We can, we may this day look up from this poor earth to heaven, behold a *Father*, who regards the most unthankful child with tender love; who, what else changes, keeps the same to us; who frowns not on us as our awful Judge, but, race after race, affords us refuge. To this Eternal One confiding faith may say, *My Father*, because it knows Him in the Son of His love. And to this Father we may go with all that fills our heart with heaviness perhaps to bursting. Yes, we may go to-day without the smallest dread that He will turn the lost son from His threshold. Nay, verily, He merits nothing less than such distrust! The Father's hand, that overflows with blessings; the Father's eye, that watches ever tenderly; the Father's heart, that constantly stands open; the Father's voice, that summons, warns, consoles, the Father's house, what treasures it has given to the hired servant, far more to the son!

But, alas! well may this day bring also to us our deepest *pain*. Each day shows us the repetition of the same sad tale—the children straying. Nay, if we but go a step beyond our dwelling, we shall see the parable of the lost son exemplified in many forms. Not one of all the days within the year,—their number three hundred and sixty-five,—but voices rise of accusation against us; and—of that unseen register of guilt, the books lie open before God. What precious gifts abused, what warnings slighted; how long and far, perhaps, ye have now

strayed in foreign lands. O ye lost sons, if to-day ye have come to yourselves, seek solitude, and God send you the grace of tears! Yea, even when we have again come to Him, and in our doings honour Him and serve Him as best we may, how often we come short! What knows He not who knows all things; and who among us must not from the bottom of the heart exclaim, 'I am not worthy to be called Thy son!' Oh that deep feeling of deep unworthiness, placed in contrast with such stupendous blessing, with a long-suffering patience inexhaustible! It brings us this day to the only place that fits us—on our knees, deep in the dust, before our God.

Nay, this day we have no greater *need* than to behold the downfall of the last wall of partition between our hearts and Him. Him to thank for all He gave, and all He took away; upon His fatherly bosom to weep out our griefs, till He Himself shall dry our tears; Him literally to tell all that so long has weighed heavy as lead upon our hearts; but, above all, to confess sin, as that which has offended God's righteous judgment, as that which has deserved stern retribution, and long has forfeited the smallest claim to hope. Nay, this day it is not possible that we should fail to own our guilt. We cannot; but we would not, if we could, hide ought from Him who waits to lay the hand of grace upon the sin-stained head. God be praised, we stand not in uncertainty how we shall be received by Him who sought us when we were far off, and who comes to meet us in tenderest compassion, now we are brought nigh by grace. We know already the consoling words, which He alone can proffer to our souls, as they advance to meet Him from out a darker depth. But just on this account we cannot, will not, may not, seek elsewhere than on our Father's bosom that repose which elsewhere flees us. This is the last, the highest, the most blessed *duty* to which the New Year's eve now summons us.

Before the last stroke of midnight, may His eye behold us kneeling at the threshold of our Father's house, with these words in our mouths and in our heart: 'Lo, we are here; we come to Thee because Thou art the Lord our God.' As truly as He liveth, this prayer shall not remain unanswered, but, living or dying, we shall be with Him!



NEW YEAR'S DAY—FIRST JANUARY.

'Immanuel, which, being interpreted, is, God with us.'—MATT. i. 23.

HEALTH and happiness in the New Year! With this wish we hear countless multitudes almost mechanically greet this morning, and yet how much material is here for question, hope, and prayer! Health and blessing in the highest and best sense of the term; but who can tell what is good for men on earth, and who can in one single instance guarantee that the end of this way shall be glory and blessedness? The worldling has no answer to these questions, and even to-day no other choice than lies between the giddiness of levity and the heaviness of despair. But the Christian, who sees a new way open, grasps with increased earnestness the firm staff of God's word and promises, which are all Yea and Amen in Christ. New Year's day is, as it were, the naming day of the Redeemer; and He who, eight days old, received the name of Jesus, may, at the same time—oh priceless consolation of the New Year!—be also called *Immanuel*.

Immanuel,—God with us! Yea, verily, this is the conclusion of our past history, to which we now turn back in thought. Can we reflect without it being with us, as with the steward of Abraham's house, of whom it is recorded (Gen. xxiv. 21) that he held his peace, to wit

whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous? 'The Lord hath been mindful of us:' this with touched hearts we must acknowledge on the last night of the old year, and on this boundary between the old and new erect a stone of memorial to His bounty. But of all the blessings vouchsafed to us, the greatest still are the spiritual in Christ Jesus; and the whole gospel preaching of the completed year, the voices, too, of Christmas and the Eucharist, are all summed up in that one word—*Immanuel*.

This is, besides, the point of light in midst of deepest gloom. Dark clouds meet the eye throughout the compass of the heavens, hovering above the world, the Church, our fatherland, our home, our heart; and sometimes we would freely give our all for one bright ray of sunshine to shoot across the darkness. God be praised, in this obscurity a light has risen in Him who bore that name, Immanuel, and has not laid it down. A God *above* us: how comforting the thought, when worn out by the rushing tide of time! God *for us*: that says indeed yet more for the heart which without Him cannot truly live, but by renewal learns how sin has raised a barrier of division between us and our Maker. Nay, but God *with us*. God in Christ, with all His riches truly and for ever ours. This one word takes in all things: it counterbalances each pain, gives strength for every struggle.

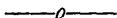
But it may be also the motto for the *future*, the tranquillizing answer to many questions, which now cause the anxious heart to beat. Whether the way shall prove weary or short, precipitous or smooth, lonely or not forsaken, no mortal can with certainty foretell. But this we know, in Christ we are of God, in want, in death, or life secure: if He is for us, who can be against us? If he is with us, hap what may, what lack we whilst faith fails not? 'Who knows?' inquires the

weak in faith. 'I know,' replies the well assured, 'that neither death, nor life, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus my Lord!'

Also that '*my*' of personal belief must this day for the first time sound in many a heart depressed by care; but then, too, must the sacred choice be made on bended knees: 'that whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's!' Oh, my God, cause all that is old in my heart to pass away, and by Thy grace make all things therein new! Give me an eye to view Thy riches in Christ Jesus; a heart to trust in Him and love Him; and feet which will not walk in any other path than His.

'Trust in Thy help, Thy comfort, Thine advice,
And all the treasure which for faith and love
In storehouse of Thy promises there lies,
Ye jewels of my soul. I have enough!'

—V. ALPHEN.



SECOND JANUARY.

'This year shalt thou die.'—JER. xxviii. 16.

'HOW long have I to live?' The question of the aged Barzillai (2 Sam. xix. 34) hovered involuntarily on our lips also, when we a few hours ago wrote for the first time a date for the new year. God be thanked that no one can say to us, with the same certainty as once through Jeremiah it was declared to the shameless and lying prophet Hananiah, 'This year shalt thou die!'

With deep wisdom, the approaching termination of life has been concealed from our view as by an impenetrable veil: he who will die to-morrow may be as little

aware of it as though he could reckon upon twenty years of earthly existence. And yet, can reference to the fearful sentence of Hananiah, fulfilled in his case within two months, be deemed wholly inapplicable to the circumstances of all of us; and as we cast our eyes around, not in the first place to speak of ourselves, are there not some to whom, with every appearance of probability, it might be said that before the close of this year they shall have departed? Are there not others of whom in a greater or less degree it seems likely: trees marked by an invisible hand as ready for felling? Is it not for each of us possible that we have entered unconsciously on the last year of our earthly pilgrimage; and can it be deemed unfitting, vain, unprofitable, that each should lay this solemn thought to heart: This year may be the year of my death? Ah me, the legend of a foreign clock: 'All (hours) wound, but the last one kills,'¹ describes the fate of all, mine among the rest; and why may it not this year be fulfilled in me, or in one of those dearest to me?

Yes, it is more than probable, although to-day especially it is so seldom thought of. The partner of my life, whom I this glad New Year pressed to my bosom, may by next New Year's eve wear widow's weeds; the reckoning begun by me, another hand may close: the business which for the first time this year promised return, may prove a failure. Good God, all my past years summed up appear a dream; and of the little remnant, not twelve months, twelve days, twelve hours, are certain! That sounds sad, nay, dismal, and yet were it not well if serious thought were not so rigidly barred out as it often is? Should not to us, and many others, the year's commencement be a more solemn thing, its course more fully

¹ ' *Omnes vulnerant, ultima cedit.*' On the Rathhaus clock at Minden.

used, its close more happy, if we but bore in mind the psalmist's prayer: 'that I may know how frail I am'? (Ps. xxxix. 5.) Doubtless this thought has its dark side, but fearful is it only to him who has no God before his mind, no Saviour for his portion, no heaven for his last home; and even the fear it brings to such unhappy ones may be the way to peace, leading them to repentance. That we may be able this year to die in peace, we must have made our peace with God, and there is no peace with God save that which Christ has wrought out for us. But, this peace once ours, how changed are all things to our eyes! That which erewhile was wearisome becomes an elevating, nay, a happy thought. The redeemed of the Lord are here a band of strangers traversing wearily the borders of the lake, whilst, when the light is brightest, the longing eye scarce can discover the faint blue outline of the mountains that lie beyond. Ever and anon the ferryman returns, to waft them over in his boat singly to the other shore. But the order in which he takes them is to us inscrutable, and cannot be foretold. Now he takes the old, and now the young; often he removes without regard or ruth the desire of our eyes, whilst we stretch out our longing arms in vain.

Oh thou weary one, who bearest thy cross and followest Christ, perhaps this year release may come to thee; and know, that never hadst thou friend who can give thee shorter pain and longer joy than the last foe, whose power to harm thee has been crushed. The year of death is, to the Christian, the year of being thenceforth with Christ. Oh my soul, prepare thyself this very day as in the view of death, resolve, endeavour how thou mayest achieve most good, if indeed *this* year. Lord, teach us to number all its months, its weeks, its days, its hours, that so we may apply our hearts to wisdom!

THIRD JANUARY.

'And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.'—I CHRON. iv. 10.

MYRIADS of wishes flow from our lips as we enter on a fresh term of time; myriads more of longing desires for ourselves and those most dear to us, we cherish secretly within our hearts. But how large a portion of these would bring a blush into our cheeks if heard by strangers, and of which the Searcher of hearts cannot but say: 'Ye know not what ye ask!' In truth, not merely our petitions, but our desires also arise incessantly as our accusers; and well may we, with shame and confusion of face, turn to the record of the long forgotten inhabitant of Judah, perhaps not even an Israelite by birth, who only meets us once in Scripture history, and of whom merely this simple trait has been preserved.

Jabez,—immediately we learn to know him as a man *who set bounds to his desires*. Is not each human heart by nature covetous, and hard to satisfy? so that in one sense it may be likened to the horse-leech with its two daughters spoken of in the Proverbs, that incessantly cry, Give! (Prov. xxx. 5.) But here we find a man resolved to dam the swelling tide of his desires within a narrow bed: who seeks not after things too high and wonderful for him: modest and temperate he seems, a spiritual kinsman of that Agur (Prov. xxx. 8), who desired neither poverty nor riches, but to be fed with food convenient for him. That which was good he desired in moderation: in regard to evil, not that he should be totally exempt, but only that it should not grieve him; above all, that God's hand might be with

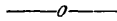
him, but without stipulation of what this hand shall do for him.

Then, like an upright, pious servant of God, *he turns his wishes into prayers*. Wishes and prayers! how wide the cleft that often parts them! Lurks there not many a wish within the secret depths of thine own soul, which thou durst not spread before the holy eye of the great God! Here is a man who hides his wishes in his heart only as regards his fellow-men. He 'called upon the God of Israel,' and looked to Him alone for safety, and offers up his prayer almost in the same fashion as Jacob formerly had done at Bethel; indeed, the one story recalls the other to our memory (Gen. xxviii. 21). Evidently Jabez is least concerned for outward joys and blessing, and treasures most what is, in truth, most precious, that which best pleases God, though in many prayers this is forgotten or left out.

What marvel, then, *that Jabez sent not his prayers to heaven in vain!* God loves the unwearied supplicant, even as He loves the cheerful giver; those whose desires for earthly blessings are restricted within due bounds, often receive 'full measure, running over,' of the same. The good is showered upon them, the evil measured out to them: God's hand is with them always; it is as though Jabez already spake to us the words which ages later were revealed: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.'

Thus he steps forth into the light of history as one who justly was accounted more honourable than all his brethren, wiser in his demands, happier in their fulfilment, more faithful in his employment of the gifts from above: at first, indeed (ver. 9), and this his name betokens, a fountain of pain to the sad mother that bore him, but thereafter a joy and blessing to the children whom he saw blooming around him!

And we, who thus encounter the short but pregnant story of a life, within the half-forgotten leaf of the old chronicle, can we pass it by without perceiving that the secret of happiness consists not in finding *much*, but in finding *enough*, and thus we should restrain our ardent wishes even when these are innocent and modest? Ah! in another sense than is intended here, it still is true, that the man whose prayers and wishes correspond, like those of simple Jabez, is only born with pain. By nature we are entirely different, hard to wean from foolish lusts: but through the grace of God we may gradually change to something higher, when the brighter light of Christ is kindled in us. In truth, the Christian must see to it that he has never cause before this wise man of the East to cast his eyes upon the ground abashed, and that continually his wishes for himself are bounded by one prayer: 'Lord not the daintiest, but the best.'



FOURTH JANUARY.

'I delight to do Thy will, O my God!'—Ps. xl. 8.

HAPPY the man who, from the many and often fruitless desires of his heart, has reached one constant choice: who is delivered from the dominion of vain aspirations, so as to be able to employ with a sincere conscience these words of the psalmist: '*I delight to do Thy will, O my God.*' Verily we see at once that not little is implied in making this the watchword of our life. How difficult at times for us to know, in every circumstance, God's will and pleasure! How much struggle must often intervene when we have decided what is this will ere it becomes indeed our own! And not rarely, even when this is past, yet flesh and blood have still to be encountered, and the great question, 'Lord, what wilt

Thou have me to do?' must be continually repeated, in order to silence the countless other questions caused by the intervention of men, and which often create great pain. Alas, how frequently, even with the best of men, our carnal appetites cause daily strife; and although the old rhyme says, 'Self-denial is my food, and prayer my daily bread,' how frequently the godly soul is snared as through a foreign power, by cravings wholly different! In our covenant with God, at times, it happens as in treaties with earthly princes. The articles made public are sufficiently just and reasonable, but there are on one side, at least, some secret ones which greatly cripple the working of the treaty.

And yet, despite thyself, must not thy conscience also confess, even though reluctantly, nay, must it not plead for the course of life which this man after God's heart declares to be the best? Or is there any higher task, or one more beautiful, any purer happiness, than to fulfil in thine own sphere that pleasure which alone is good without shortcoming: to execute that in which the angels, veiled with their wings, co-operate: that God to glorify of whom with greater right than in the ancient times faith now can testify: 'He set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings; and He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God'?

Nay, it cannot be doubted, all depends on this, not merely for eternity, but even for the present time; this 'I delight' of David is indeed the keynote to which the soul-harp is attuned. Thus, first the life attains to *unity*: it is no longer parted into a score of different interests, the one more insignificant than the other: thenceforth it has but one desire, and thus one only task below. Thus, too, it first knows *joy*, because all other pleasures sooner or later bring satiety: this only brings a satisfaction incessantly ascending, and God is served, but not in vain. Thus, too, it first brings *fruit*, even in

the shortest and most sorrowful of lives,—fruit to God's glory and to the good of others. Nay, verily, they have not lived in vain, who with a perfect heart have walked in the counsel of God's holy law!

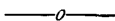
'I delight to do Thy will;' thus may, thus can, thus must it be, because the psalmist's exclamation, 'Oh my God,' expresses life and truth, belief and choice, which hang inseparably together. Alas, why is the heart so often far from Him, the consciousness of personal relation with God so faint and sickly? With perfect honesty dare I employ such terms, and before God declare—'To do Thy will is my delight'? Ah! when I look within, it more becomes me in deep contrition to confess (ver. 12), 'Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, they are more in number than the hairs of my head;' and again (ver. 17), 'I am poor and needy.' Yea, poor indeed, my God; this heart, so often softened, yet in spite of all, hardening again; this perverse will resisting right, and drawn towards the evil! Long ere this I had despaired of mercy, but to mine own amazement I must cry out, 'The Lord thinketh on me!'

Here then is all my hope and comfort, that, despite my backslidings, Thou wilt not yet draw back Thine hand; that Thy good pleasure is nothing less to me than life and new creation in holiness, and, after Thine own appointed way, salvation. Oh teach me then, despite myself, a firmer faith; yea, such a faith that this 'My God' of inmost fellowship must ever deeply and more fully vibrate within my heart! But write it now Thyself, after Thy promise, 'on my inward parts;' shape, form, and quicken me to this sweet, loving service, as I have never been before. What flesh and blood account a weariness, make my delight; bend every thought and feeling to do Thy holy will alone. My days, perhaps, are short, and the desire of mine eyes has often passed

away. Awake, and strengthen this desire within my heart before I die!

‘ My God to please, my heart to raise,
Of my self-will to bear no trace ;
His will to ask in every case,
His battle never to disgrace ;
Unweariedly the crown to chase,
My cross to bear, my head to raise ;
Lord, teach me for all things to praise,
Nor e'er complain, while last my days.’

—V. ALPHEN.



FIFTH JANUARY.

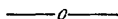
‘ And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel ; and for a sign which shall be spoken against ; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.’—
LUKE ii. 34, 35.

ON this day we, in common with many Christians of an earlier and later period, once more direct our attention to the venerated form of Simeon in the temple ; not at this time again to listen to his exalted song of praise, but rather to ponder on his earnest prophecy uttered upon the same occasion. How many things combine to render this prophecy remarkable and interesting to us ! In the first place, as the announcement of what was shortly to happen, from the lips of one so superior in spiritual development to those of his own age, it must have made a special impression on Joseph and Mary. Alas, what darkening clouds are visible to them gathering around the scarce arisen light of the world ; what gloomy forebodings must doubtless have assailed Mary's spirit at these words ! Might not this sorrow, we almost inquire, have been spared to her on

this bright day of her life? Must she so early begin to thrill with pain? Was the sharp sword which, at Golgotha, should pierce her heart, already pointed at her bosom? Certainly it was agony to her, yet needful and salutary, to preserve her from falling into a dream of exquisite beauty, the awakening from which would have been too cruel. She has indeed quickly experienced it: the eye of the seer has but just discerned it, that He who came to bring peace to earth has also come for judgment. For too many in Israel shall Christ become a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence; and whilst as yet there can be no mention made of the rising again of any by His means, and God is but commencing to point out in Him the tokens of the Redeemer's advent, promised long, these signs call forth in unbelief a hatred which cannot be appeased. Even at Golgotha, whilst the King of the Jews achieved the unlooked for rising of the penitent thief upon the cross, His presence there was for the fall of his impenitent fellow-sufferer; and when, thereafter, peace through the blood of the cross was preached by St. Paul, this same gospel became to many the savour of death unto death, as it was to others the savour of life unto life. So has it been through all succeeding ages, and so it still remains. Men wonder often at the fierce resistance the gospel of the kingdom finds even when shown forth in all its charms; but is it not far more surprising that, in spite of all hostility, it holds its own, and ever and anon displays its triumph? We have thus no ground to hope that, in the time to come, the mode of action in God's kingdom shall be changed from that which Simeon foretold. Rather does the prophetic word call us to watchfulness against the last deadly encounter between light and darkness. Happy for us who know the signs which, to the very end, shall be spoken against, yet also to the last shall be maintained!

What a striking revelation is here given us in the prophetic declaration of Simeon! A revelation, on the one side, of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, which thus contemptuously rejects God's highest gift, and turns that which He has sent for blessing and for exaltation into a stumbling-block and stain. Never is the power of darkness more clearly seen as such, than when it offers battle to Him who is the light of men.

But, on the other side, it is a revelation of the majesty and greatness of Him whose coming is nothing less than God's pervading judgment. As regards Him, no man may stand on neutral ground. By Him our inmost thoughts are known and judged, and our feeling towards the gospel. And to such a fall and rising again He has not come by chance, but is *appointed* by Him that sent Him. Oh wondrous revelation, above all, of God's adorable overruling power, who in this way fulfils His purpose in the world's salvation, and makes the fall of Israel our uprising! Our uprising—has He indeed become this for us all, for us and ours? Is all opposition to this sign of salvation quelled in our hearts? Do we, like Simeon, bear witness of Him in our circle, with frankness, wisdom, faithfulness? Alas, ours is the guilt, the shame, the loss unspeakable, if, after all, He comes to be our *fall*. Lord, show mercy, that it may not be so with one of us!



THREE KINGS—SIXTH JANUARY.

'And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.'—

MATT. ii. 10.

THE *feast of Epiphany*, the feast of the first manifestation of the new-born Redeemer, has for centuries been held on the 6th of January. It is called the

Three Kings, as a memorial of the coming of the wise men of the East, who, according to the unsupported tradition of the Romish Church, were kings, and three in number. And well does this event deserve to be held eternally in glad remembrance, illustrating as it does the leadings of eternal Providence. What a moment is this in the history of God's kingdom on earth, in which the first Gentiles come to inquire after the dwelling-place of the new-born King of the Jews, and the prophecy concerning their call by the gospel begins to pass into fulfilment! What an adorable instance of God's overruling power, which makes use even of men's prejudices and errors, in order to the guidance of those who truly seek the way of life! What a striking announcement at Jerusalem, that the Hope of the prophets had appeared; but also, what a significant presage of what Christ should thereafter meet within that city! What evident care of God over Joseph and Mary, who, by means of this unexpected visit from such exalted personages, were strengthened in their faith, increased in their watchfulness, but, at the same time, saw their anxiety regarding the threatening future lightened! Above all, what exceeding joy for these noble strangers, to be the first to hail the new-born King, whose advent, by the testimony of heathen writers, had filled all the East! Here, truly, it stands written in the heavens in starry characters, 'The Lord reigneth;' and deeply do we reverence the wise guidance of Him by whom the voices of nature, of Scripture, and of the heart were attuned to magnify together the glory of His Son in His incarnation. Unbelief, with haughty disrespect, may now regard such passages of Scripture as legendary, but at that time Christian knowledge maintained its truth with power, and justly filial faith yet triumphs, as it from year to year beholds the star of the Eastern Magi shine afresh.

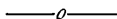
But is not their history at the same time an emblem of a blessed *present time*? Yes! From directions innumerable the question sounds, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? and the Gentiles rejoice in the brightness of His presence. Those who are wise and prudent in their own eyes, know Him as little as in those days did the scribes and Pharisees: the mighty ones of earth, like Herod, stand in open or secret opposition to Him; the world, as, in those days, Jerusalem, is troubled at the fame of His coming. But meanwhile His star goes calmly on, casting its rays on those who watch for its appearance. These, by various paths,—some strange, but all converging to the same goal,—the Father guides, to seek the cradle and the cross of Christ; and they who find the Saviour joy no less, even at the present day, than did the wise men guided by the star.

Yea, what imports their coming, seeking, finding, well considered, other than the prophecy of an infinitely more glorious *future*? Like these first-fruits of the Gentiles, all the rest of the race shall inquire after the root of Jesse, which shall stand as a banner to the people. The voice of nature and of Scripture, of the heart and the leading of God's providence, all constantly work in harmony to bring men to Christ's feet. The highest requirement of the heart, the finest cravings of our nature, are realized in the contemplation of Him; and all the glory of earth shall at last, willingly or of constraint, combine in the service of His kingdom. Have we, too, already with the eye of faith beheld His star in the east, and are we come to worship Him as our Lord? Or are we still too wise to walk in the light of God's word? Ah! thus already the report of the first coming of the Lord made Herod and Jerusalem to tremble. What, then, at His second manifestation, in place of the friendly star, shall be the terror-striking signs of the Son of man! May none of us draw back

unto perdition ; but may we all belong to those—the truly wise—who have already sought a place even at His feet, who is the Saviour of the world ! Let us then hasten the day of His appearing, by prayer and sacrifice, and not be chary in bringing greater gifts than those God's kingdom upon earth demands of us ! What would you have said of the wise men, if they had been such niggards of their gifts as to bestow only the gold, without the myrrh and frankincense ? Gold, and myrrh, and frankincense for Jesus ! Love does not calculate, but first of all bestows itself, then all it owns, to honour Him who is worthy of the homage, not only of the simple and those who are lightly esteemed, but of the wisest and the mightiest.

‘ Joy in the face of God's own Son !
 Know, He conceals His light from them
 For whom, long since, at Bethlehem
 In vain the star appeared and shone !’

—HASEBROCK.



SEVENTH JANUARY.

‘ In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.’—MATT. ii. 18.

SUPPOSING the result of the Eastern Magi's visit had been unknown to us, could we have imagined that which the narrative records: the flight into Egypt, the murder of the innocents at Bethlehem, and the still, secluded life of the child-Christ in lowly Nazareth ? In truth, if anywhere, the Scripture may be taken here as motto : ‘ God's ways are not our ways ; but as heaven is higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than ours.’ Yea, verily, His ways are not as

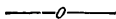
ours, since wheresoever we turn our eyes we behold deeply impressed the mystery of God's mode of government. Herod on the throne at Jerusalem, and Jesus, the true King of the Jews, in the poverty of Bethlehem ; Herod goaded by madness, and the innocents dying a cruel death ; Herod unpunished and in safety, the guiltless Son of God in banishment. And anon, the son of Herod in the royal palace, and the Son of Mary at Nazareth, in still oblivion. Is it not as if the Judge of the whole earth hath forgotten to do right ; as if iniquity is clothed in power unlimited ; as if all things together have conspired to quench the world's great Light in darkness ? Nay, verily, but round about the Lord are clouds impenetrable !

Nevertheless, righteousness and truth are the foundations of His throne, and He who needs to give no answer for any of His deeds is the same God who can explain and justify them all. Just in the very traits of history which give cause to speak of darkness, the light begins to break upon our vision the longer and more earnestly we gaze. Jesus, indeed, we find in poverty at Bethlehem ; but is not this poverty only to the honour of Him who came, not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give His soul a ransom for many ? The innocent we see ruthlessly murdered ; and the voice from Rama awakens in each heart of man an echo of abhorrence. But for the guiltless babes, fallen in such a cause, could early death be aught but early bliss ? Must not the agony unutterable which pierced the mothers' bosoms have brought them nearer heaven ; whilst Herod meanwhile, smeared with infant blood, beholds his object frustrated by the miraculous escape of Jesus ? The Son of God we see in exile, but this was, as it were, His nursery : Joseph and Mary, led by a way they knew not, were freed from earthly expectations ; whilst, meanwhile, in the child the words of the

prophet were fulfilled, and Herod, at the last, did not escape deserved punishment. The Son of Mary, lastly, we behold concealed in lowly Nazareth, whilst the son of Herod mounts the throne; but does not even the oblivion of Nazareth become the vaunt of faith? There grows concealed from the world's eye the heavenly plant of renown, which shall refresh and quicken all the earth with shade and fruit; and even the name of Nazarene, which stood written above the cross, points out to the attentive observer the long-promised Messiah. Nay, here too, there is no lack of reason to re-echo in reverential tones the words of Scripture: 'O God, Thy way is in the sanctuary; who is a great God like unto Thee?'

Can there then,—we may inquire with greater boldness, on contemplation of such a Scripture text,—can there be aught more infatuated than to oppose a God like this? What more presumptuous than to blame His rule? What more blessed than follow such a guidance? Ah, if we could learn of Joseph and of Mary, how we should do this without reserve and silently! Yet with us it goes often as with them: we dream of Canaan with its ease and plenty, and God brings us through an Egypt of trial. Our whole heart pants to proceed, and we are called to wait. But still remains with us the word of power, 'He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, that they bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy feet against a stone.' The path which seemed so winding leads to the goal at last; through Egypt and through Nazareth, the Anointed of God reaches His throne. Thus was it with Christ the first-born, and thus with all God's seed. And we who know this, can we ever grumble over dark paths and mysteries unexplained, when we should rather bear in mind the lesson, 'Be still, and know that I am God!' Nay, we may rest assured, the sad lament of even the saddest Rachel shall pass into a song of triumph, and her

bitterest tears be changed to pearls of brightest ornament to deck God's crown of glory in His incomparable providence.



EIGHTH JANUARY.

'For the days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of more strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow: for they are soon cut off, and we fly hence.'—Ps. xc. 10.

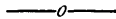
IS it possible? Scarcely is the new year born, and already it is eight days old: the first morning stands before us like yesterday, and already the first week has made wings and fled away. And the second shall tarry no longer than the first; each succeeding month seems shorter than that which went before. Nay, venerable Moses, thy descriptive term, 'as a dream,' is in no wise too strong.

Ah, what is all this life considered from a mere natural standpoint, but a short, cloudy winter day, of which we have so many in this sea-girt land! Doubtless much is changed since the period referred to, when this first psalm was written; countless are the inventions of man's ingenuity. But the limits of this existence are for the most part just as narrow as in the desert, when Israel journeyed; and for the lengthening out of life, in so far as regards strength and duration, the art is in its infancy. Alike in wilderness and paradise, the death bell sounds its gloomy knell—'To-day me, to-morrow thee!' to old and young. It may be, in youth, the hours creep slowly through that part us from some longed-for goal, but riper years find still that days have wings; and as the end draws on, one needs not be a gloomy fanatic to feel that the two words of Moses, 'labour and sorrow,' are an epitome of life. Nay, though the smile of mirth plays round the lips, it cannot be

denied that at the bottom of every human heart there lurks a world of misery, which would become actual despair if that light were altogether hid from us, which to the eye of faith has risen over life, rich and yet poor. For life here below is, and remains, fleeting, uncertain, full of trouble ; and if a poet of our country has declared life itself to be the hardest thing the world demands, the statement may be gloomy and one-sided, but is yet comprehensible.

What shall we say to these truths which are constantly confirmed to us in the most striking manner? Shall we, as so many others do, treat them with levity? Alas for those who drown care in the giddy bowl, and who seek to silence remorse and thought by echoing the song of mirth and jollity : ' Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die ! ' We die to-morrow, and we waste to-day one moment of the time on which rests our eternity. And does this short life sometimes seem too long, what are the cares and troubles of this present time compared with the intolerable anguish that may be looked for on the other side ! Nay, rather will we this day, and every day, begin with Moses' prayer, ' Lord, teach Thou us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom,' and fervently give thanks that we know Him who is greater than Moses, and who, in contrast to this life, ' which is nothing but a continual death,' has brought to light that life of immortality revealed through the gospel. Now we know, as many as believe, that life is short, yet this short life is long enough to honour God, to be a source of blessing to others and for ourselves, to seek the one thing needful, which maintains its value throughout eternity. Life is uncertain ; but just this uncertainty calls us to have always our loins girded, our lamps burning, and we ourselves as those who wait their Lord. Life is full of trouble ; but for the sinner it must be so, since he must wean his heart from

much that he holds dear, but cannot keep. To the Christian it may be also so; yet in the deepest pain he merely casts into the field his heart, a seed for heaven. Reconciled with God in Christ, we are content with all that here menaces and casts us down. Yea, how can it harm the very least of us to reach the boundary line which Moses marked? We are soon cut off; but early death is to the Christian an early bliss in heaven. We fly away, but, God be praised, we know the better land, and in our holiest hours would seek for nothing more. And this is certain: when we reach that place where we shall see God face to face, nothing would tempt us to return. Our psalm is only for the wilderness; in Canaan our songs shall be of triumph.



NINTH JANUARY.

‘Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light.’—ISA. lx. 20.

LONG nights, short, cold, and frequently dark days, are what we look for at this season of the year. Only for a few hours the sun stands in the heavens; and if the moon at times brightens the winter night with her sweet beams, soon she draws back her silver horns, and leaves the world in darkness. Striking image of the inconstancy of so many earthly joys, but still more striking emblem of what the eye of faith beholds in looking to the Father of Light! Yea, verily, it is a truth consolatory beyond the power of speech to utter, which the prophetic word to-day makes known to us: God is the eternal light of His own people in their darkest hours.

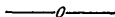
What a thought! God a light, the fountain of all knowledge, all purity, all joy, all hope, uniting in Him-

self the highest dignity and stainless truth. God an *eternal* light, that shall shine still, even when the brightness of all earthly lights are dimmed, and when the night of sorrow and dismay in sevenfold blackness comes on apace. God an eternal light to *His own people*; for all His own without distinction, whether here below they walk in cloud or sunshine, under the Old Dispensation or the New; for us and for our children after us, if they inquire His will, but, at the same time, only for His own. He has been this light already from eternity; He is it still this very moment to thousands seeking Him from the depth of darkness; He shall remain so till, according to another prophecy, 'the sun shall be changed into darkness and the moon into blood.' How does such a promise, believed and thus embraced, pierce like a kindly sunbeam this cold, dark world of ours! With how many things it reconciles us! How shall the clouds of the mysterious world above us pass swiftly from our sight, and heaven open as we place our first footstep within the silent valley of the region of death! Ah, wherefore grieve although the clouds to-day are thick and dark; they may veil the Sun for a brief season, but cannot quench His beams!

But, moreover, what cause for mourning we shall have, if we turn away our eyes from the bright Sun of Truth to fix them on some transient light of earthly joy, which even at morning tide may pass away, or seek our comfort in the changing moonlight of earthly love and friendship, which so often conceals its face when gloomy midnight enters! What cause have we each day afresh to pray, that He who in Christ Jesus makes His light to shine upon us, would specially send it to pierce within us, and beam and triumph there! How hard we are to teach also in this respect! How many brilliant stars of earthly joy must perish in our sight, ere we will lay to heart to turn our eyes from these to the one Light

with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning! It may be God's design to teach us in the darkness that which, in the light of fortune and prosperity, we had no will to understand! that He alone is the unchanging light, where, if men tarry, they need never fear the midnight darkness. Oh let us thank Him, though it be with tears, for all the heart resigns of that which is perishable and unsatisfying, that so our eyes may rest on the unchangeable. Let none of us, who are believers, take up our position as though our sun had sunk beneath the horizon for ever, or as though our moon had reached her latest stage. We have an *eternal* light; and were our eyes not bandaged by our own sin, doubtless we should behold God's glory beaming through the darkest clouds. This much is certain, the dimness lies never with the Sun, but in our sight; and He who said, 'The Lord shall be your light eternally,' also said, 'The days of your mourning shall be ended.'

What glorious thoughts are these: an end to our darkness, but never to God's friendly light, and that His light shall rise at the darkest season! Lord, give us clearer vision, believing hearts, and thankful lips; but specially give Thou us grace and strength, that we may truly walk in this light and by it, as the children of light!



TENTH JANUARY.

'And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.'—JOHN i. 16.

WHAT comprehensive testimony the beloved disciple of Jesus adds, in the introduction to his Gospel, to the voice that had prepared the way of the Lord (ver. 15), in reference to the appearance of the Messiah! Evidently the subject here referred to is the

grateful remembrance which, combined with the highest assurance of faith, overflows the lips with that which has filled the heart for years. 'Out of His fulness verily,' so it stands literally, 'have we all received'—and that indeed—'grace for grace;' so that, in communion with the Lord, one gift of grace constantly draws forth the others. Thus John testifies not merely in the name of all his fellow-apostles, but of all his fellow-believers, confident that no one can contradict his bold assertion. He is thinking, undoubtedly, of the fulness, and the grace, and the truth he had even now recorded (at ver. 14); but with the grateful and adoring retrospect of the glory of Christ's advent, he combines His other gifts, and sums them all up in the one word, *grace*. Grace after grace had flowed for him and for his fellow-believers from this fount of life: there was, indeed, nothing received from Christ which did not merit the name of grace in full significance. But even an apostle cannot speak more strongly, and yet in no respect he says too much; moreover, to his testimony believers of all ages since append their seal. Yea Amen, in the incarnate Word is the fulness of light and life, which is not merely unexhausted, but inexhaustible. Yea Amen, we can only be in truth rich in spirit, when we receive from Him continually that which we sinners lack in ourselves, and which we may seek to all eternity in vain from fellow-sinners. Yea Amen, once more, scarcely has Christ become our life, till it is also our experience that gifts of grace are not poured forth on us with niggard hand, but that one blessing constantly entails another; yet so that that which came first is not removed, but heightened and made fuller. Grace first awakened life within, then with life it gives also light, and from these two wells out a further gift of grace, namely power, which, so far from injuring life and light, or making these superfluous, brings them to perfection. Nothing of all that He

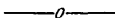
has given—and truly this is boundless—does the Lord reclaim ; rather does He follow His own rule, ‘To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundantly.’ Is it not as though we have heard the echo of the old psalm, ‘Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it’? (Ps. lxxxix. 1.)

Of how great significance is this word of John, of which, after so many centuries, there has never been the slightest failure to the faith, the life, the hope of the Christian! A word for our *faith*. How high must Christ have stood, whose memory, half a century after His departure, still called forth such testimony! How divinely rich and great and good must He yet be, who gives to all men liberally, and upbraideth not! Of the Jesus of unbelief naught can be said, unless men make themselves guilty of gross exaggeration or deceitful play upon words. We will therefore unconditionally and constantly adhere alone to the Christ of Scripture and of John.

A word for our *life*. True spiritual life is nothing else than a continual receiving from the inexhaustibility of Christ: no mere giving, but a receiving; nay, a receiving before there can be speech of gift. First when it is so and remains so, we have no further need to fear impoverishment or decline of life within our souls; then only is the stream in uninterrupted connection with the source. On the other hand, the more we have ourselves received, the more we can impart to others; whilst in return,—John tells us so,—giving impoverisheth not, but rather tends to riches.

Lastly, a word concerning our most precious *hope*. Could an apostle, in name of a whole generation, at the end of his course speak thus,—and may each redeemed one repeat the same,—what may then be looked for from the united host of all Christ’s people at His second coming, and with what testimonies concerning Him shall

not the heavens resound when, at the last, God's kingdom shall be full! Only a full chorus, 'as the voice of many waters,' can celebrate perfection somewhat according to its worth, but always still must be the keynote, 'Grace for grace;' yea, even the life in heaven shall before all things be a perfect receiving out of this fulness without parallel.



ELEVENTH JANUARY.

'In the house of the righteous is a great treasure.'—PROV. xv. 6.

A GREAT treasure, and one which, as it were, lies in our grasp? A treasure in the house, and thus not miles away and ill to find? A treasure in the house of the *righteous*, without limitation; of every upright man, God-fearing and devout in heart, whether this house be great or small, high or low, held in esteem or scorned, rocked by heavy storms to the foundation, or brightened by a ray of heavenly peace? This all believe not; many hold it not in memory. It seems in diametric opposition to the spirit of an age that seeks its cherished treasures of this life ever further and further apart from its surroundings.

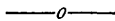
And yet the word of the wise king contains a truth, which in all ages has found confirmation in every way. How do we each one in little matters overlook the treasure which a benign Creator now has placed beneath our roof, within our reach! A *great* treasure is in the house of the righteous, since there dwells *content*, which never hankers after that which higher wisdom will withhold from us, but gratefully esteems what highest love bestows, and though his earthly portion be but scant, enjoys more real happiness than falls to the lot of fortune's favourite. There dwells *love*, which binds

hearts as walls are bound, only to part in dust and ruins : love which makes imparted joy more sweet and sorrow shared the lighter, and roses twine around the cross which ever soon or late is laid on our weak shoulders. And where love dwells—whose thoughts have not outrun the words—there dwells God ! God from above, God from within : God before our eyes, God in the heart : God in prosperity, God in pain : God as guide of soul and mind, God in light and darkness : is there, can there be, treasure greater than this ? No, answers every heart that God has touched.

But now, God in the house of each of His own people to guide, to warn, to strengthen, and to bless : who feels not how the pain mixed with every blessing is compensated, and the joy heightened, when He, the Giver, Himself, with all His riches, is our own ? Ah, how different the household which the end of the proverb pictures : ‘but in the revenues of the wicked is *trouble*’ ! or, even their highest joy contains some bitter dregs which poison all. Sin poisons all—the kindest household, the richest treasure, the most happy marriage. A life lived for the world becomes a life poor in repose and rich in daily disappointments. Household piety is thus the only key to household happiness, the means by which even our family distresses, our cares and wants, are changed to gold refined : since if God be for us, who or what can be against us ? Sorrow here works for good : the treasure, too, of faith wherewith the heart is charged grows and increases in the strife and turmoil of life, like the fair lily of the desert in still majesty midst thorns and thistles. And if it be already such delight to dwell in this world in that favoured house where God the Lord of heaven and earth gives life and blessing, what shall it be above in His own house, where all is holy, perfect, and eternal ? Of the great treasure hidden there for all the upright in

heart, our lips as yet can only stammer forth praise scarce articulate.

Whence comes it, then, that so many who possess a house have yet found within it no trace of a great treasure? It is apparent; for this experience cannot be ours till we adopt the motto, which in the first half of this century a pious king had inscribed above the entrance to his inner chamber: 'As for me and for my house, we will serve the Lord.' Alas, how many seem to forget that if we would possess true treasure in our houses, we must have it first of all within our hearts, and that to have it there, the best gold mine, opening up continually, must ever be afresh explored! This gold mine, what should it be but God's own word, the gospel, to us much more familiar than to the king of Israel? Happy we, that we may freely open it, muse on its truths, and practise them: God grant that we may use it in such a manner as really to become wise, rich, and ripe for heaven! Let us value this treasure ever more: let us never leave this gold mine undisturbed; but let us especially ask the heavenly Owner, that He would, first our hearts and then our houses, fill with treasure, not to be bought with gold or weighed with silver!



TWELFTH JANUARY.

'Love no man anything, but to love one another.'—ROM. xiii. 8.

DEBTS—even the word jars on us unpleasantly; who does not gladly avoid the subject? We praise the merchant, who at the end of a definite period can assert that he has discharged the claims resting on him to the last penny. We censure the father of a family who, in order to maintain name or position in society as long as possible, runs into debt which he can never pay. We

cast on those who shirk their lawful obligations the opprobrious epithet of cheat or swindler, and commend the youth whose first steps in the career of public business show determination at all times to keep out of debt. And yet there is one debt from which even the Christian furthest advanced within the kingdom may fear that he shall never be wholly absolved, nay, more, from which he may not even wish to be absolved. It is this at which Paul aims, when in his exhortations touching the mutual and social duties of believers, given in the chapter which precedes, he sums all up in this one precept: 'Owe no man anything, but to love one another.'

In very deed, this debt of mutual love is to the Christian one of *vast extent*. How wide the circle within which, at constantly increasing distance, those objects meet you, which have thus a lawful claim on your beneficence! In daily toil, both for the food that perishes, and for that too which shall endure to life eternal, there comes a task of love for others which is never done. Our nearest surroundings have unquestionably the oldest and the holiest claim, but can we reckon how much further our duties reach? Wife and children, brother and sister, kinsman, may demand our love; but have not also the poor, the stranger, nay, even the foe, claim to it? The stone cast into water causes an ever-widening circle, lost at last, no doubt, but imperceptibly: so is it with the spheres in which the Christian's love extends itself. The atmosphere becomes thinner, swifter, purer, the farther it removes from the circumference of the earth; more elastic the nearer it attains its upper surface: is not the case the same with that affection which the Christian gives forth to all, those furthest off or close at hand; and who can therefore say it ever terminates?

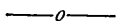
Moreover, this unseen debt is at the same time *holy*,

and no one can discharge us from it in anything. But is not He who claims it from us our highest benefactor, our only lawgiver,—He who first loved us, and that when we were foes? Is not love the imperial law of Christ, of which, in His own person, He has given us such an unparalleled example, and has, moreover, prescribed as the special characteristic of His disciples? Is it not the first, and at the same time the noblest, fruit of the Holy Spirit's power; and has not the world a right to doubt our faith and repentance, if it finds us hard and unloving after all? It is apparent that he who does not in some degree concern himself about the payment of this debt forfeits his title to the name of man, of Christian, of future citizen of heaven; and wrongs not only others, but himself.

How strange soever it may sound, this all unseen but holy debt is finally a *blessed* debt: no terms of capital or interest can here be set, except that men draw more advantage from their large-heartedness than all the worth of what they give away. It is more blessed to give than to receive: it forms a part of the Christian's new creation in God's image: it gives a foretaste of heaven on earth: nay, it prepares us here on earth for the employments and rewards above. Ah, if we every day henceforth would set ourselves with earnestness to pay some single debt of love! The world has so long heard our words of faith and love: it asks at last to be shown more and better deeds than heretofore.

When shall this actual doing no more in vain be looked for from us, but pass at least into partial fulfilment? Whenever this word of the same apostle is accomplished in us: 'Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another' (1 Thess. iv. 9). A passage such as the lesson for to-day is very fit to give us a deep glance into the cold selfishness which lies hid in the heart of every sinner,—and in the regenerate is not rooted out.

The apostolic blessing, 'The Lord increase you, and make you to abound in love towards each other, and towards all,' may we each morning fervently call down upon ourselves and on the brethren!



THIRTEENTH JANUARY.

'*W*hist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?'—LUKE ii. 49.

THIS first inquiry upon record, with which the incarnate Word opened His lips to speak as such, when He, as child and youth, commenced the revelation of His glory, should it not awaken our highest interest? On its own account it merits this, because this question breathes in its still simplicity a godlike majesty, and at the same time a human amiability difficult to be expressed. What a moment for Mary and Joseph, when, after having for three days sought the child sorrowing, they find Him in the temple, and receive this question from His lips! What a moment for Jesus too, when, having for the first time gone up to the feast at Jerusalem, He feels the dim perception wake within Him with overwhelming power, of how different He is from all around Him, of whose Son He is! What a moment for Israel, nay, for the world, when this child of marvel begins to speak,—He in whom even the highest wisdom personally is revealed, whilst already the child appears as the germ of what the youth promises, and the man shall one day be and remain! There is a period as in nature when the bud opens, or when the sun, already risen in the heavens, steps from behind a cloud, and straight lets fall a brighter ray upon the wakening world.

But of how much greater significance becomes this seemingly so simple word, when we behold it as the

type of all Christ's work when He appeared on earth in the guise of a servant to perform His Father's will! Or may not this first question be termed also the summary of His whole thinking, speech, and action, from the beginning to the end? To be about His Father's business, that was the watchword of the Son, even before His advent to this world. Not to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him, He appeared, who was in the form of God, and who was willingly obedient in all things. Wherever others found nourishment for their souls and the joy of their lives, it was His meat and drink to do His Father's work on earth, and to seek His glory. As He now regards with infinitely more attention His heavenly calling than His worldly concerns, this was to Him at all times all in all; so that through the pervading impulse of His nature He could not do otherwise than with word and deed, as formerly the ancient writer testifies: 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O my God!' With this word in His heart He has Himself surmounted the shame of the cross, in order to offer to the Father that spotless sacrifice, which can alone outweigh the disobedience of millions. And is it not permitted to ourselves to go yet a step further, and to add, that He as with this motto climbed the throne of earth, to reign as king over God's people there? No, even there He knows no higher joy than service; and when at last all foes are subjugated and brought to nothing, He gives again the government to Him who has put all things under Him, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. xv. 27, 28). Thus in this first word of Jesus we have the perfect God-man in His life before His advent, in His state of humiliation, and in His future glorious life above; and 'we have seen the Lord' when we behold the child, just as we see the sun mirror itself not only in the ocean, but also in a single drop of water. Such a Christ indeed appears at once the highest revelation

of God's glory, and the highest crown vouchsafed to manhood.

But such a passage as this, for the Christian at least, contains also a course of instruction, which we can never enter on without advantage to heart and life. That which was the motto of Christ, when He was but a child and youth, suits every Christian, and should be also yours and mine. It is not for us to lead an idle life of empty contemplation, but of unwearied, active love, whilst it is called to-day; not to follow our own caprice, but only that which the Father hath required of us; not to employ merely a portion of our power, but to give up ourselves without reserve, not murmuring, boasting, or tarrying, as the most natural and simple thing in all the world—also, in truth, our joy and choice. Although our task may be irksome, laborious, in itself uninteresting, still from this day we must regard it as our Father's business, and in this spirit zealously seek its accomplishment. How differently would the world look upon Christians if these were always found most busied in their Father's work! And the Father Himself, with what good pleasure would He from heaven behold such faithful, loving service! Alas, how many things in us must change ere this can be the case! God be praised, that in our Lord we have received more than a blameless pattern! He is first of all our Mediator and chosen Lord, but next He must be followed with ever firmer footing, our great example, whom the Holy Spirit fits us to imitate. This is the only proof that Christ indeed lives in our heart, if in holy simplicity we make the great beginning, the Father's work, the child's most natural task.

FOURTEENTH JANUARY.

'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men.'—LUKE ii. 52.

THIS is the short but significant narrative of Scripture regarding the period of development which Jesus passed through in the retirement of Nazareth, before His entrance on His public ministry. Not small the food for thought which this affords, even in what it does not tell, but much more in that which it suggests, and, most of all, through what it expressly teaches us.

Questions numberless touching the youth and childhood of our Lord hover upon our lips, but find no answer; yet is not our belief in the historic truth of gospel narrative strengthened, when we compare St. Luke's sobriety upon this point with the profuse account of miracles with which apocryphal evangelists, even in early times, have sought to fill this void? All doubt, where it might still exist, of the reality of God's only Son becoming man is possible no longer, when we behold Him grow from babe to child, from child to youth, from youth to manhood, and harmoniously develop in mind and body. But, clear as sunlight beams on us the unity in greatness of Him whose increase at every varying stage of life was undisturbed, pleasing to God, and without gap or sudden spring, as it had also no false step.

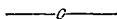
Verily such an High Priest became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, even from His youth made like unto His brethren in all things, yet without sin.

And is not this narrative intended, in the measure and degree suited to the circumstances of each individual, to be repeated in the case of each one of His people? Nay, what the gospel testifies in this respect is re-echoed and

impressed in every Christian conscience with a power which makes doubt impossible. As the Son of God appeared for us in the flesh, so must He also be born in us, grow and attain a form, in order that we, at first only children in grace, may become youths, men, fathers in Him. All real life in this kingdom shows itself beyond the possibility of mistake, especially by its growth. The spiritual growth it shows, even as the increase of the Lord, is not sudden, but gradual; not apart from means, but through the use of fitting aids, of which for us as for Him the book of nature and the volume of Holy Scripture, the school of household life, and, above all, secret converse of our souls with God and with ourselves, take the first place. This growth also, like that of Jesus, becomes apparent by its fruit. It strikes the eye of all who surround and observe us; it is crowned with God's approbation already here below,—how much more on high! But how many are found who consider this spiritual growth as a matter of indifference, or as wholly impossible of attainment; who are ready to vaunt what Christ has done and is doing *for* us, but cannot hear of what He does *within* us, of increase in grace, without a dread of self-righteousness! Assuredly, regeneration is indispensable; but is it then enough that a child shall see the light, unless it grows to manhood? If we stand still while all around press forward towards heaven, we lose our ground. The seed sown in our field may slowly germinate,—nay, the Son of man remained from His twelfth to His thirtieth year in silent preparation for the task He came to execute,—but when it does not strike root downwards, nor sprout at all upwards; when the blossoms fall off without forming fruit, or if, after a considerable lapse of time, the buds continue as hard and as close as at first, it is to be feared that the touching censure is deserved: 'Ye have a name to live, whilst ye are dead.' Can there be anything more melancholy

than to increase, indeed, in stature, but not in wisdom; in years, but not in experience; in height and breadth, but not especially in depth?

Oh, let us pray both for ourselves and for each other, 'that our increase may be evident in all things;' and though our path may lie through much privation and discord, let us not forget that even He, the first-born among many brethren, learnt obedience, through thirty years of quiet self-denial, amidst a circle every way beneath Him. For the 'still in the land,' especially the stay in lowly Nazareth, is most significant. 'Holy apart, who have God in the heart;' so let it sound henceforth within our ears and consciences!



FIFTEENTH JANUARY.

'Ye are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.'—GAL. iii. 26.

AFTER riches and sensual enjoyment, there is nothing which the world prizes more highly than consideration and honour. To be sprung from a family of distinction, or to be allied to one, is a privilege greatly treasured by those to whom it has fallen. But what mere earthly rank or dignity approaches theirs to whom the apostle's words in truth apply: 'Ye are all the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus'! Each word is here a chapter; each chapter calls for earnest thought. Children of God! No sooner do we image the infinite majesty of God, thrice holy, than we must sink before His awful presence, overwhelmed by our own nothingness; and when we call to mind the burden of our guilt, it must appear incredible that such a God could take us for His children, if His own word had not declared it so.

Children of God: full-grown men with all the privileges of sons, in opposition to the state of pupilage

mentioned in ver. 24: 'Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster unto Christ.' We feel that this implies far more than to be merely God's creature. True, as rational and moral beings, we are God's progeny, and He shows fatherly compassion towards the worst transgressor. But what avails the Father's love to the lost son, who in a foreign land has wasted all his goods, and on his side has broken the holiest ties? God is a Father in Christ Jesus; but the rebel against His rule becomes, in the full sense of the expression, again a child, whenever he in faith and penitence consents to grasp the hand held out to him from heaven, and, guided by the Son, returns at last to that blest home whence he had strayed so far. Clearly the apostle makes it known: they *only*, who with all their heart believe in Christ as their Redeemer, can in the fullest sense be termed God's children. Only in the Son the Father's loving heart opens to sinners. 'As many as received Him, to them gave He power to *become the sons of God*,'—which thus by nature they were not,—'even to them that believe in His name' (John i. 12).

Without Christ no right knowledge of the Father; except through the Son, He is only an unknown God, a Sovereign unapproachable, inaccessible. Without Christ no fellowship with the Father, because sin builds up a middle wall of partition, and, except through the Mediator, the impure cannot dwell beside the pure. Without Christ no conformity to the Father, because it is alone His Spirit which renews us after the Father's image, that He might be the first-born among many brethren. But now, on the other side, in Christ *all* believers are in truth God's children, whatever be the name or dress they wear. Greek or barbarian, bond or free, man or woman, there is no difference: one Lord who rules over all; one God and Father who is above all, and for all, and in all. All are *the children of God*,

enjoy His favour, bear His image, are His heirs, no longer are under a schoolmaster, but enjoy fellowship with the Father Himself, and draw near to Him with 'Abba, Father,' on their lips.

Yet once again, is any higher honour possible, any vocation more exalted, any blessedness ineffable like this? Well might a religious writer testify: The children of princes are doubtless rich, but in this lower world no king can be compared to you, who are the children of the King of kings. And this high privilege is not merely assured to believers, even the least of them, but has been actually bestowed by grace, never to be resumed. In truth, real liberty, perfect equality, the happiest fraternity, are found in the kingdom of God. This is the one privilege which we cannot forego without injury thereby to our own souls. What a gospel, which humbles us to the lowest depths; nay, but only in order to exalt us to this high rank!

What a call to personal belief in Him, who alone has exalted us to this high rank; to earnest brotherly love towards all who are God's children; but specially to filial devotion towards this tenderest of all fathers, who in Christ loved and received us whilst we were yet enemies! Blessed are we, as many as believe, that we are no longer under the law, but under grace; that we are not mere servants, not even mere friends, but, through the love of the Father, acknowledged as sons of the house. Alas, that we so constantly should feel constrained to cast down our eyes at this pathetic complaint of Scripture: 'If I am a Father, where is mine honour? saith the Lord of hosts!'

SIXTEENTH JANUARY.

'I beseech you therefore, brethren, through the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.'—ROM. xii. 1.

WE live in an age in which, on many sides, complaints arise of sad exaggeration. Especially in the region of religious worship and Christianity, we frequently find opposed the saddest indifference, and a dangerous indulgence in extremes. No wonder that the admonition against exaggeration, even in good itself, should be repeated by the world, and that the demand that our service of God shall at all times be a *reasonable* service should be now and again proclaimed as from the housetops. Must not such a demand commend itself to our approval? How should the service of God be at strife with our nature and our position as reasonable beings? Yet the question is merely, what do men understand as reasonable service, and especially, what is considered as such by those who are opposed to a complete surrender of heart and life to God and Christ, which, through the nominal Christianity of our age, is so easily decried as fanaticism? Paul evidently thought otherwise when he, in contrast to the material Mosaic Dispensation, set forth this *reasonable* worship; that is to say, the spiritual service to which Christians, as worshippers of God in spirit and in truth, were called through the gospel. The service of God, says he, demands the sacrifice not merely of that which belongs to us, but of ourselves; of the *body*, here taken as the seal and representative of the whole personality, which must be freely dedicated to God. And the sacrifice, moreover, must be *living*, in contradistinction to the Old Dispensation, where the victims were first slain: *holy*, so

that they exhibited the character not merely of Levitical cleanness, but also of moral purity: *well pleasing to God*, since God can be pleased with nothing less than such a self-sacrifice of unconditional surrender. In one word, the entire Christian life must bear the character of a daily renewed thank-offering to the glory of Him who in grace bestowed a perfect atonement in Christ Jesus.

Already it appears, that the *reasonable* service of God of which Paul speaks is not so easy as those to whom we have referred, in their superficial judgment of the matter, have supposed, and at least implies that hearty affection which may so easily appear exaggerated, and yet, when well considered, is so perfectly, nay, so conclusively reasonable. Willing, undivided, daily devotion of ourselves, with all that is ours, to Him, higher than this not even the Almighty Himself can claim. How much easier, perhaps, would it be, once for all, to die for the cause of God, than, throughout a long course of years, day by day, to live to His glory! How much does it already cost to offer willingly to Him that which we most prize of our possessions; and how much more does it include daily to lay upon the altar before Him our hearts, with all their wishes and desires! And yet, who with one moment's thought durst style the inexorable demand too great? But for what other purpose, then, is man, as head of earthly creatures, placed below in such a temple, save that he, as priest, should offer up a sacrifice? And what is then the end and aim of all God's tender mercies, by which the apostle here so touchingly beseeches his brethren, except to make of us a royal priesthood, consecrating to Him the spiritual offerings of self-denial, love, and unconditional obedience? Can God claim less than this; nay, should we ourselves be satisfied if one jot or tittle were conceded of this claim? Oh, if we only try to think who God is, what He has bestowed, and what the scheme of mercy He

has wrought for us deserves, we should not marvel though the apostle claimed this reasonable service of God in louder tones. The Israelite might not bring within the holy gates ought that had blemish ; and can the Christian dare to speak of faith or gratitude whilst in his conscience anything remains impure or insincere towards his God ?

But those, moreover, who know themselves somewhat, and thus know also the power of sin and of the world, can such suppose they bring an offering acceptable, so long as yet they have not fully learnt that which immediately must follow : 'Be not ye conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God' ? There can be no true devotion towards God until the heart is fairly weaned from this world's love, and so renewed within the inner man after the image of God, that the power of selfishness is quite destroyed. The field must first be cleared of weeds before this heavenly plant of reasonable service has room to germinate. But if the heart be indeed renewed, the understanding opens to perceive, and in each case to discern what God requires of us ; and at once the will, bowed by a gentle force, brings forth the offering of all offerings, the offering of our own identity in grateful love.

'Life, grace, salvation, Lord, I ask,
 With joy to meet the Sabbath task ;
 Give me of all good gifts a share,
 Strength to attain the bright and fair.
 Then shall each day a Sabbath be,
 Earth, Thy bright temple, full of melody,
 Till Sabbath bells above in ecstasy
 Call me to don my priestly robes, and mount on high.'

—LANGE.

SEVENTEENTH JANUARY.

'In quietness and confidence shall be your rest.'—ISA. xxx. 15.

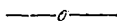
NOTHING is more unreasonable than a desponding Christianity; nothing more holy than the demand: 'Let us not be weary in well-doing.' And yet there are circumstances of the inner and outer life, in which we speak as to wise men. More progress is to be made by waiting than by working: there may be a greater power in silent, patient looking for, than in the restless exertion of all the forces of the mind and of the body. The same word of God telling us concerning the crown of life, bids us 'so run, that ye may obtain;' and says to us also again, with no less unanswerable justice, 'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy' (Rom. ix. 16). But this, too, is an evidence of our deep corruption through sin, that we, on the one side, so frequently are unwilling to go forward, when God calls us to work and strive; and, on the other side, presume to intermeddle, when He would evidently have us to wait in patience, and watch His beckoning nod. It was not Egypt only, but also Israel, that so frequently, against God's will, in the pressure of the moment said, 'We will flee upon horses, we will ride upon the swift' (ver. 16); and the path they had chosen in self-will, as conducting to sure victory, led to destruction. Have we also something of that rash temper which prefers to cut the knot of difficulty rather than wait till the time comes, when higher wisdom shall unravel it? Then stands before us, as inscribed in capitals, this passage, '*In quietness and in confidence shall be your rest.*'

It is not stated that this way to real strength and rest is the most easy, a smooth path for all feet: that would

only show that ye know not your own selves. To wait is often harder than to work; drudgery not seldom easier than doing nothing, except when carried beyond all bounds. And yet this last, most difficult requirement is in a thousand circumstances that which is asked of us; and at every turn God shows us that the strength born of still trust is not alone our highest, but, in fine, our only power. There is no one who in truth can say with the poet, 'My soul is ever at rest with God,' but he whose soul is really *set* at rest by God's free grace; and it is only set at rest when the passage is understood which immediately precedes our text: '*in returning and rest shall ye be saved.*' Returning, for the first time, and then ever anew, from the many to the One; from our own devious paths to God, and to His way; from those things which are seen of men, in a word, to the things that are not seen; behold the solution of the problem for those who truly desire a rest which cannot be disturbed. We men say incessantly to ourselves and to each other, Forward! God, on the other hand, repeats, alas, how frequently in vain, Back! Back, not merely from the broken cisterns, which can hold no water, but even from the streams of living waters to the source itself, the everflowing Fountain, where first you watched the shady spot where full rest and new strength are to be gathered. True strength is born of rest; true rest is only tasted in personal communion with Him who is Himself the fountain of true life.

Our restless want of steady perseverance, on the contrary, makes us weak against the great—nay, even against the many little struggles which await us; we are always eager to *do* something, even when we ourselves essentially *are* nothing, and the result is usually open or hidden pain and shame. Because the teaching of the text so often is forgotten, so many of us fail in our best plans, though we may humbly hope that through grace

we are preserved. The sun's resplendent image is only faintly mirrored in that lake ruffled by incessant storms. How many times are we like children, whose form and feature constantly elude the utmost skill of photography to reproduce; because not for one moment can they stand still! Ah, if we better understood, and seldomer forgot, what power inflexible, not alone to suffer patiently, but, moreover, to work efficiently, lies hid in that calm trust, of which, perhaps, we speak so glibly, and yet so few possess! First have we learnt something—nay, all things—when we have come so far as really to desire to do nothing when God shows us that 'His hour is not yet come,' and when we daily increase in the 'patience of the saints' (Rev. xiv. 12), which does not release from obedience to the commands of Jesus, but yet is one with it.



EIGHTEENTH JANUARY.

'Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.'
—MATT. lii. 15.

EIGHTEEN years long the Incarnate Word seems to be silent, to wait, to hide in the lowly obscurity of Nazareth. Here, for the second time, the words that issue from His holy lips are laid up for us in the Scripture record. 'Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' What is this other than the audible but deepened echo of the question asked by the child of twelve within the temple: 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' The dawn has become noon-day, the bud has burst to bloom, and now the full-grown man stands ready to fulfil the promise of His childhood. What a word for *John*, who there beholds Jesus in quiet lowliness, coupled with majesty

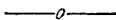
ineffable, journeying from Nazareth to Judea only to claim his baptism! Even although he had not said already, 'I have need to be baptized of Thee,' such words from lips like these must have awakened consciousness of personal inferiority within the Baptist's humble breast. 'Thus it becometh us;' must not the pioneer at once perceive that He, who thus without the slightest question, yet without arrogance, places Himself beside him, stands infinitely far *above* him? 'Suffer it to be so now:' nothing less is needed than such injunction, gentle and yet imperative, to impel John to the submersion of that stainless head surrounded with still glory in the water of baptism. After this utterance there is no more rejoinder from John: far less is any confession of sin, as in the case of others before baptism, required from Jesus' holy lips: nothing except the baptism, and thus the threefold revelation of the name of the Father, the glory of the Son, and the power of the Holy Ghost.

But also what a word for *Jesus*, who, as it were, with this great vow of office upon His lips, steps forth from His obscurity into His public ministry! By this watchword, treading the ground where now the greatest of the prophets waits Him,—representative of a people, of mankind, who have already through so many centuries longed for Him and expected Him. He says—nay, He at once demonstrates—that He is ready to do, to bear, to offer up all that is asked of Him as sovereign of God's people; and thus His followers, even the Baptist, from whose hand He comes to seek the outward sign of consecration, must not shun to declare His holy pledge. Men felt at once, Here is a self-appreciation, but at the same time a devotion to His great task, which has no parallel. The 'us' implies much more of self-abasing sameness of *condition* than of essential *likeness*; the 'Thus it becometh us' is one before which all needs

must bow, and from which He in no case will swerve. This second utterance of Jesus, is it not even as a prophecy of what shall come to pass till the last 'It is finished' echoes forth? From this baptism of water onward to that of tears and pain, always the same trust and obedience; at every turn, although at times unspoken, that determined 'Suffer it to be so now' to each and all that would turn Him but a single step out of the path which he has found, nay, which His finger calmly traced. Verily, He who here speaks thus by word, anon by deed, is sovereign in God's kingdom, just because He is and will be nothing else than this, the Father's zealous servant. The voice from heaven thereafter pealing forth His praise, can scarce exalt to higher glory than that which He now manifests Himself.

And lastly, what a word for *us*, who in this utterance acknowledge Him as Son of God, our Saviour and example! But wherefore, then, is this great principle not only expressed but reverently followed, since through the obedience of this one, *the* true man, many should be called righteous? And He who was capable of such obedience, had He not equally the right to claim obedience from His followers? Ah! that it were also the aim and watchword of each citizen, as once of their great King, in His name and through His power, in their turn 'to fulfil all righteousness,' and to do 'all things without murmurings and without gainsayings'! But, alas! is there one single day in all our lives in which we do not stand much further than even John from this unparalleled, this perfect pattern? How often are we willing for anything rather than for the obvious duty of the moment, and forget the 'Suffer it to be so now' in an infinite number of circumstances that hinder us in the path of new obedience. The will is possibly with us, but the performance? The performance it may be,

but the continuance! Oh, my Jesus, I have need to be baptized of Thee: come Thou to me!



NINETEENTH JANUARY.

‘Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye?’—JOHN i. 38.

THE first meeting of the recently baptized Redeemer with His first followers claims our highest interest, as the unmarked beginning of God’s spiritual kingdom on earth, and striking manifestation, moreover, of His heavenly greatness and love. But is it not yet more attractive to us when we regard this significant incident as an omen of good to us who come after them? With perfect right this gospel page now opened might bear there inscribed: Jesus meeting earnest inquirers after salvation.

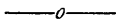
‘Come and see,’ thus Philip counselled Nathaniel: ‘Come and see,’ so, too, should we repeat to those who would behold as in a crystal mirror, clear and bright, that which the Saviour was and is for all whose souls have learnt to thirst for God, the living God, more than the hart pants for water brooks. Look! there He wanders on the quiet banks of Jordan, still with the lingering gleam of triumph on His brow at having thrice repulsed the tempter in the wilderness, and waiting now until the Father Himself shall send Him these first friends. But scarcely venture two of John’s disciples a step towards Him whom the preacher of repentance had pointed out as the predestined Lamb of God, till Jesus *marked* them. What a moment in the history of God’s kingdom, worthy the pencil of Raphael to portray, that moment when Jesus, it would seem unwittingly, turns round and meets the gaze of Andrew and his un-

named but not unknown companion, and speaks to them that word of greeting which John even in his hoary years never forgot, and therewithal He *looks* so kindly! 'What seek ye?' thus he begins: 'whom seek ye?' He knows already; and also here He indicates at once that attachment to His person is only pleasing to Him when it proceeds from earnest desire after salvation.

The reply to Christ's demand is also beautiful, although consisting only in another modest question: 'Rabbi, where dwellest Thou?' yet He seems to comprehend at once the bearing, and *invites* those who preferred it to keep Him company. 'Come and see,' is the response, and like a voice from heaven it sounds to them; and when they in simplicity and faith go with Him to His dwelling, and spend successive hours in His society, they soon find themselves perfectly *satisfied*. The light grows dim before their eyes, twilight creeps on: in the stillness of night ties are formed there which in eternity shall never be unloosed: and whereas at first they felt themselves drawn irresistibly to Jesus, they are, before the parting, permanently *won* to His fellowship. What a Lord and Saviour is this perfect, historic Christ, such as the fourth Gospel pictures Him; and even from this first page of His biography what material is given to echo back that song of triumph: 'We have seen His glory!'

But is not Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and bears He not the selfsame loving heart, although His feet no longer tread this earth? Yea, verily, still is it He who lessens and brings to nought the distance that divides each of us from Himself. The Elder Brother makes Himself even as the least; the eagerly desired and sought is found, oh, with what ease, whene'er the eye which saw through John and Andrew, discovers in the heart, along with wavering and doubt, yet *uprightness*. He does not even wait until the

heart has asked Him its first question. He Himself takes the initiative, and changes strangers to friends, friends to disciples. The greeting, 'What seek ye?' is after these hours and to all time the keynote of His soul, His great, and, in the main, His only question to every heart, to every race, to every age, even to our own beclouded time, which searches everywhere with eagerness, yet at last shall nowhere find ought precious save in Him. Who can expect too much from love like this, which will cast down each wall of separation raised between it and our hearts? But what better answer here than like these two to come ingenuously to see His dwelling, and forthwith remain inseparably united to Him? He who does so shall find, like John, a tenth hour, ever memorable, prepared for him; and like Andrew, won, he in his turn shall then go forth to guide more wanderers home.



TWENTIETH JANUARY.

'This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory: and His disciples believed on Him.'—JOHN ii. 11.

IF we had not been told in what the first miracle of our Lord when upon earth consisted, should we have ever imagined that it had been the change of water into wine on the occasion of a marriage? And yet, now that we know it, not merely are we fully reconciled to this first manifestation of His glory, but we perceive in it the fit beginning, the significant presage of all His wonders; yea, the prophecy of His transforming, cheering, conquering energy, which He, as sovereign of God's kingdom, still exercises to the present hour. What a contrast between the Mediator of the Old Covenant and that of the New! Moses, in his first miracle, turns water into blood: Christ in His turns water into wine, not

merely of the usual quality, drinkable, but into wine exceptionally good. What a difference between him who prepared the way of the Lord in the wilderness, feeding on locusts and wild honey, and shunning social intercourse with all his kind, and this Son of man, who comes there eating and drinking; and, Himself the longed for Bridegroom of His people, heightens the pleasure of a marriage feast! Yea, all the contrast between law and gospel, between prediction and fulfilment, between earthly and heavenly, given in an emblem grasped from the fulness of life, and too high for embellishment.

From first to last this narrative of John calls us to contemplate the glory of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. With friendly sympathy He takes upon Himself at once their need, for nothing human can be foreign to His care. How wise the test which let the want be felt a moment, and lent the aid looked for through Mary, not at her hour, but when His own was come! What calm display of power, when, without vaunt or parade, He performs the amazing transformation, and compels nature inanimate to do His bidding, whilst those around perceive no trace of it! What rich beneficence, through which He gives not merely just so much as satisfies the natural momentary want, but bestows liberally and upbraideth not, and shows that He has come so that His people may have life, and have it, too, abundantly! What increasing joy He here prepares for the conclusion of the feast, but at the same time makes serviceable to the strengthening of His followers' faith!

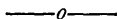
Here is a different Master from the world, which offers first her choicest wines, and afterwards the worst: gives her best gifts first, and leaves out of sight the rest. This Benefactor kept the good wine to the last. And did, does, promises He not the same for ever to those who

have received Him as a guest into their hearts, and in necessity with patience bide His hour? Yea, verily, out of water makes He wine; out of want, sufficiency; out of the lower and incomplete, the higher, perfect, and eternal. The spiritually-minded man is one with Him; and life grows ever better, happier, and at the last, beyond expression good. The Lord does not withhold from them the bitter waters, but mingles with it in their cups so much refreshing, that in it men find wondrous sweetness. Thus is it even here below; and now the blessedness above, what is it else but bliss shaped out of sorrow,—heavenly wine transfused from tasteless water of the earth? From water to make wine, was His first miracle; from the old world, the new earth shall be His greatest and His last. Fellow-sinner, unlock to Him thy heart: such a friend and Saviour it requires. Fellow-Christian, prepare for Him thy house, that He, as the best friend, may enter and dwell there; thy joys through Him shall be increased and hallowed, thy sorrows lightened, nay, even chased away. Fellow-sufferer, bide His hour; and, above all, whatsoever He saith unto you, that do: He tries only to gladden you. Oh, if our household life were more attuned to that same tone which reigned, no doubt, in this marriage feast at Cana; if our servants—men and maidens—were as prompt to do as they are bidden, even though they do not always perceive the reason of the order; if our wives and mothers looked as hopefully, as dutifully, and as submissively as Mary did on Jesus,—how widely different, and how much better, should things be in and around us! nay, how much clearer through God's grace before the eye of faith should be the prospect of the feast above of the redeemed, where the best wine, the highest joy, shall never fail! Glory to Him who trains us here even in the school of household care and trial, in order, when His time

shall come, to lead us in to the marriage supper of the Lamb!

‘ Out of need He riches made,
 From the Word, the Living Bread.
 The Passover made Christ’s festival,
 Of this earth Heaven’s vestibule ;
 Of the sinner made a saint,
 Whose joy and glory none can paint.
 Thereof has He for a sign,
 First changed the water into wine.’

—LANGE.



TWENTY-FIRST JANUARY

‘ He needed not that any should testify of man ; for He knew what was in man.’—JOHN ii. 25.

WHAT *exalted* testimony, given by John to his beloved Master, is of more value than what we here set down? It must tend to make more clear that otherwise strange phenomenon, that the Lord appeared so little taken with the success He met on His arrival at Jerusalem. Perhaps His early friends beheld therein the presage of something great and glorious; an eye like His pierced deeper than the surface. Already from the first He searched all hearts, and marked too well the difference between blossoms that promise much and the ripe fruit. He knew, not from observation and sad experience alone, but, moreover, from inward contemplation, what was in man. Not merely the individual, but *the man*, as such, in every man He knew and gauged. One feels this is not mere knowledge of mankind in the ordinary sense of the term, but a higher Divine knowledge, which here, in combination with the entire spirit of the gospel, points out the Redeemer. How high becomes He thus exalted through this testimony, even above the

highest of God's servants, to whom a knowledge such as this is not complete, or reaches merely certain heights, or is only lent as the result of momentary revelation! Jesus, and Jesus only, knows man at once, without restriction, by His own power, with clearest certainty.

Once more amazing testimony, and yet entirely *true!* Already the voice of John has here peculiar force of evidence; who like him had read his Master's heart, and how many proofs of the justice of his observations might have been drawn from this same gospel history? Think of the many instances recorded of Peter, Nathaniel, the woman of Samaria, and many more besides. But the whole story of the Lord's life gives us proofs innumerable of this truth; nay, on reflection, it is seen that nothing *can* and *must* be but what stands written here. How, but with such a perfect knowledge of *man* as such, could our Lord be the perfect Saviour, how the trustworthy Guide to everlasting life, the righteous Judge at the great assize? Many experiences of life, never to be forgotten, may even at the present day convince His friends that He knows and understands them as no one else does. Yea, what one of the Fathers in the fulness of his heart said to his God, 'Thou wilt not deride me, for Thou understandest me,' the Christian may still in secret repeat to Him, the Good Shepherd, who has said, 'I know my own, and am known of them.'

Do we enough consider how *fruitful* such a recollection as this may be? Before all things it calls to deepest reverence for Him, who not alone in power and mercy, but also in wisdom infallible, is the image of the invisible God. If Christ were nothing more than what the unbelief of our day would make Him, a testimony like this would be quite irreconcilable. But if there really is not a corner of the heart hid from His sight, the deeper must we bow before Him, and honour Him, the Son, even as we honour the Father. The higher

mount the praises of His love, that He who knows man in his full wretchedness and guilt, nevertheless stoops down to him, pities him, and does not give up hope of the man in the sinner. It might have seemed almost impossible to know mankind and not to hate them: in Jesus we behold the greatest knowledge of human nature joined to greatest love. Assuredly, here is encouragement to come to Him, to believe in Him, to live with Him in closest fellowship. He who knows us better than any other, calls and invites us still; us, whom men perhaps would thrust away from them with stern contempt, did they know all. To Him we can, may, must go, because we never can resist Him: He knows what opposition our stubborn hearts will offer, and yet in His infinite grace He passed not by even such as we.

But are we then truly His own, or have we but a seeming faith, as was the case with many at that time in Jerusalem? Let us not forget: we may escape the eye even of a John, but of Jesus, never. Let us take heed that still with all our weakness and unfaithfulness, at least we lack not evidence of inward uprightness before Him! Let the thought that He knows us as no one else does, keep us humble when others praise us, embolden us to bear the undeserved misjudgment of our fellows! Let us seek also on our side continually to know more what in Him is, and what is hid in us, even in the inmost depths, and value as a privilege to be searched, searched by the penetrating eyes of Christ our Saviour, which—forget this not, our souls!—see in the darkness.

TWENTY-SECOND JANUARY.

'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.'—1 PET. iv. 12.

IS there a point whereon the most enlightened Christians display so sad an ignorance, as of the absolute necessity and unavoidable character of many sorrows which they must bear on earth? Strange beings are we, not by nature merely, but also even when truly through God's grace a higher life is awakened in our hearts! Seldom do we marvel over the thousand blessings which every day return; even the greatest tokens of favour we receive with a smile of calm content, as if it were indeed our birthright. But if sensible pain strikes us, we are not merely grieved, we are amazed. We feel this amazement still increase when the first, the second, the third prayer does not remove it; our surprise becomes discontent, impatience, resentment, whenever we perceive a trial laid on us alone, from which we know or fancy others are exempt.

And yet, if we considered well, must not we much more wonder and be astonished over happiness unbroken here below, than at adversity? must it not more disturb us if we should see the rod of chastisement strike others, whilst against us it absolutely was never raised? As if some strange thing happened unto us when we are led to heaven by the same path as God's most favoured children still have trod since time began! As if a path could be for us more salutary or more desirable than that whereon the thorns are sown that lance the flesh! As if a Christian bearing no cross upon his shoulders were not like a soldier who, throughout a life-long service of his king, yet bore upon his breast no badge of merit! What is all our suffering, caused often by our

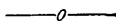
own perversity, compared with all which Christ's first followers, often in infinitely harder measure than anything we know, and moreover blameless, bore for His sake? And now, where they could rejoice, shall we think it strange when we only 'for a little time, if needs be, are in heaviness through manifold temptations'? Temptation and trial! in what an attractive light the gospel of consolation causes the believer to regard the pain of adverse times! Is it not through trial by fire that the genuineness, the purity, and the intrinsic value of the precious metals are ascertained? Nothing else can show but in and through the hours of trial if we are real Christians or not; and further, what degree of development our faith in the Lord has reached, or, it may be, how far it has fallen short; and, above all, what precious boons for house and heart we have received in this belief out of the fulness treasured up in Christ.

Nevertheless, how frequently shall we thenceforward still draw the lips together, nay, involuntarily turn aside, when God shall set the bitter cup into our hands? How often must it still in vain be called to us, 'Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy'? (ver. 13.) We have long since learnt to know—

' Rest before the end of life
 Found no mortal without strife;
 They who now in Salem reign,
 Crown'd with thorns, here writhed in pain.'

We know it, but yet, nevertheless, it seems too continuous. The flesh refuses to toil up the steep path of the cross; it faints, yea, even where the spirit has by the Holy Ghost been made willing. How difficult it is, experience shows, to fulfil the seemingly simple demand, 'to *suffer as a Christian,*' and 'to *glorify God on this behalf*' (ver. 16).

'To glorify God!' and we dishonour Him so often; just, too, when, through severe chastisement, He shows us His tender love. 'As a Christian!' and we give the world so often cause to ask, 'Where is your faith?' Alas, it is proved, too, here, that suffering alone will not avail, unless that in this school the instruction of the great Teacher is sought, received, and laid to heart. As the old psalmist sung: 'Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law' (Ps. xciv. 12); both must go together. Lord, give us light as well as chastisement, and guide us, though it be through suffering to suffering, but above all, through suffering unto glory!



TWENTY-THIRD JANUARY.

'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'—JOHN iii. 3.

THUS spoke the lips of Truth to Nicodemus in a discourse by night, never to be forgotten; but this declaration was not meant for him alone. For all following ages, for each of us without exception, it stands here, and shall remain despite all opposition and offence. Without regeneration there can be no personal participation in the benefits of the kingdom of God. Even the teacher in Israel, the devout, sharp-sighted rabbi, if he remains in his natural condition, cannot even see the kingdom of God, much less share in the blessings of its salvation. Impressive declaration! Whether we retain the ordinary rendering of the significant word 'regenerate,' or prefer the other meaning, which originally, without doubt, it permitted of a birth *from above*, at all events, nothing less is implied than a commencement of life, entirely new, leading to nothing less than an entirely

new course and development of life which, inwardly begun, soon outwardly appears, and, even without design, reveals itself in thought, speech, and behaviour. There is thus no continuance in the old line, but a determined commencement of a new one; no mere development of latent good already present, but resolute breach with each besetting sin; no pruning only of one wild branch of the tree, but entire renewal of fruit, and stem, and root.

Higher demand than this, who does not feel, no master can make upon his pupils, no sovereign on his subjects; and yet, who hesitates about its justice; who, after serious thought, can even marvel at it? But ever still, day uttereth to day, that all that is born of the flesh is *flesh*,—that is, corrupt and sensual,—and only that born of the Spirit is *spirit*. And in the kingdom of God all is spiritual in temper and disposition,—the law here obeyed, the joys here tasted, the bonds here knit between the subjects of the selfsame King. How should then the unregenerate man, the sinner hostile at heart, be of that kingdom an upright, happy citizen and stay, pleasing to God? Alas, although it stood not written in the word of truth, conscience would cry aloud to us, 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God;' and only then do we in truth become the subjects of God's kingdom, when also of us, at least in principle, it may be said, 'Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you' (Rom. viii. 7, 8). Every inhabitant of heaven won from our race is three times born: first, from his mother's womb, then by the Spirit, and finally, through death to life and bliss eternal.

Born of water and of the Spirit! no angel hand can now blot out these words. How well that the important and righteous claim can yet be satisfied! At least the water of baptism, the sacred symbol, through which men

are brought, as it were, under the breath of the Spirit of life, has been already sprinkled upon our foreheads; and the Spirit that gives life is promised, if we ask it, and works through the Word, which is not less than the seed of regeneration. Doubtless, the mode and nature of the Spirit's work are full of mystery, like to the wind which bloweth where it listeth. Even where men have traced the laws of storms, they have not found their cradle; and even less shall human intellect ever succeed in grasping entirely the first awakening of spiritual life within a sinful heart. Like the wind, too, it brooks no barrier nor restraint; but, penetrating everywhere, its presence is soon known by its effects: and thus the life-awakening Spirit breathes o'er the chaos of so many hearts. Ah! if men had less endeavoured to penetrate its workings, and more to experience these, each for himself. Therefore, doubtless, it cannot be too earnestly repeated, however strange it sounds: Better were it not to have been born, than not to have been truly born again. Let no one deem this claim unnecessary for himself, still less impossible to satisfy; and least of all, let him imagine that already in his heart and life the work is perfected. Christian education, behaviour, sentiment, and what else may be named, are still no guarantees infallible of the new birth; nay, by art a thrill of seeming life may pass over the lifeless. Not by instruction, not by excitement does it come, but by the genuine awakening of God's life within the heart which before was cold and dead; and whoso has received this grace needs least of all to be reminded, that the new-born babe, though living, yet requires nourishment, strengthening guidance, to attain ripe manhood. Regeneration is merely the beginning of the new life, and only he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

TWENTY-FOURTH JANUARY.

'But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst : but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.'—JOHN iv. 14.

WERE ever, in simple form, bolder and more attractive promises given forth than those the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well received from this 'Jew,' whom she at once greeted as 'Master,' 'Prophet,' nay, even as 'Christ'? She must already, at the first hearing, have dimly felt—Such promise is either madness, or He who makes it, and fulfils it, must be infinitely more than man.

But, moreover, we cannot ponder this strange assertion without a thrill passing over the finest chords of our nature, since, consciously or not, there lies, down in the depth of every human bosom, the same feeling of unsatisfied, of insatiable thirst.

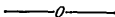
We long for knowledge, above all, of Him after whom we grope as in the darkness ; but we grope still in vain. Everywhere we read His name, but in what manner does His being reveal itself to us? We long for love, unselfish, stainless, without bounds ; but that poor heart which seeks to lay itself upon a human bosom, strikes afresh at every turn upon a stone, and the warmest suffers most from cold. We long, in a word, for life ; and whilst the restless chase after its joys goes on, it fleets hence like a dream ; and, with death already in our veins, we sometimes are unable to escape the doubt if we have yet really lived at all. Round about us are fountains of pleasures infinitely varied, but of them all it may be said, 'Whoso drinketh of this water shall thirst again ;' and, lo, there echoes in this heart : 'I thirst !' Yet there comes afresh the invitation from Him

with whom is the fountain of life. Nothing else does He desire than that we, so often disappointed, at last should make proof of Him and His salvation. He carries our expectation to the highest pitch of our weak capabilities, and yet He far surpasses it. Nay, He not only reveals, manifests, and promises new life, but also sends it in rich abundance to every one without exception in whose heart He reads the ardent prayer, 'Lord, give me this water, that I thirst not.' This life, through Him kindled and strengthened, becomes in us an independent principle. Not only have we free access to the fountain, but also within ourselves a spring of living water to refresh us, and from which we, in our turn, can give solace to others.

Doubtless, we still thirst ever anew, but never without hope. The heart, to use a Scripture metaphor, is in itself like to a thirsty desert, but now becomes a garden, fruitful and watered. God's fountains are within us, and God's river flows full and deep. And the stream has its source on yonder side. All we drink now is but a foretaste; each gift of God is here mere prophecy of greater and richer fulfilment there, where the Lamb Himself shall be the guide to the living fountains of waters. Alas, what has the world, which, in blind arrogance, imagines itself to have outgrown the gospel, what can it name to be at all compared with this most precious, this unspeakable gift! 'If thou knewest the gift of God,' we ought to cry aloud incessantly, to give this warning to the crowd ever increasing, who at far distance seek that which they might find so near at hand, and who, God pity them! because, despairing of relief to their great thirst, at last no longer own even its existence, but hold it a vain delusion. Yet we, who say we know the Saviour, have we indeed gone to Him with our soul's thirst, and yet return ever and anon with new acknowledgment and fresh desire to the old tasteless stream?

Do we attend right earnestly whene'er He speaks ; and when discovered to ourselves and humbled in our own sight, do we still talk with Him, that thereby our longing for salvation may be deepened ? Can we, like this kind woman of Samaria, let our water-pot stand, whilst we point out to others the great Prophet ? and do we press on them with seriousness the question : This man who knows all things, and can accomplish all, is not this the Christ, also for you the fountain of salvation ? Ah, if this question were not too lightly valued, and more fully answered ! That which holds true of us will be the same to others : to drink of this stream, or to thirst for ever, there is no third alternative. How little real happiness is in the world ! and yet we must repeat, with the devout and amiable Claudius :

'And yet there is in this dark night
Of death a thing of worth more bright
Than e'en the sun's resplendent light,
Which softens all the pains of earth,
To paradise gives a new birth.
I would that this were thine own choice,
Since nought avails another's voice.
The boy had lost it, when with ache,
His brilliant bubble he saw break ;
It may make bright the needy's lot,
And many rich men have it not.'



TWENTY-FIFTH JANUARY.

'I obtained mercy.'—I TIM. i. 16.

THROUGHOUT a large portion of Christendom, during many ages, this day, under the designation of Apostle's Day, has been held in high esteem, in honour of the conversion of Paul. And what event of the first Christian century deserves such commemoration

more than this great manifestation of the power and wisdom, the grace and truth, of the glorified Head of the Church? Through Paul's conversion, the Christian community in its first youth lost a dangerous foe, and gained a firm supporter, whilst it obtained a witness more to its truth, power, and divinity. But if this event, after so many centuries, is still remembered justly by us with gratitude, what must have been Paul's own emotions, as often as He recalled to mind this turning-point in his career! More than five-and-twenty years had sped their course since then, when he writes concerning it to Timothy, and still his heart o'erflows with rapture, which finds vent in this glad note of praise, 'Howbeit, I obtained mercy.'

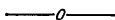
Mercy! what a word, and what a thing! It is grace on its tenderest side. Thus, as not merely to the guilty, but to the wretched, it is revealed and glorified. It is the summary of that spiritual salutation with which—as if in the evening of his days he more deeply felt its need—in the beginning of his epistles he greets Titus and Timothy. And the mercy vouchsafed to him—to him, the persecutor—was shown by no less great a One than by the Glorified, the Gracious, the Redeemer. Well might its memory be ineffaceable; and as the most eloquent of the ancient Fathers said, 'As a skilful physician, Christ administered the remedy when the disease was at its height.' Who can depict worthily the mercy of the Lord, but he who can also repeat this vaunt of faith touching the sinner's redemption with eyes turned on himself? Most blessed Paul, who thus can sum up thy past life in that one word, now also is to thee the gloomiest present brightened, and thy future, both in this life and that which is to come, can never more be dark, because the mercy shown thee is God's gift of grace, irrevocable through eternity!

But is Paul, then, the only one who may find cause for

speech like this ; and does not he himself point to the fact of his conversion as an omen of good for all whom conscience admonishes of inward guilt ? ‘Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, *that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.*’ Whenever, in a revolted city, the chief insurgent receives mercy, all the other rebels take hope and comfort. When, in an hospital, the worst case of some dire malady is cured, a new sun of gladness rises for all patients sick of the same disease, and under the same physician’s care. Thus Paul, the pardoned sinner, stands an eloquent witness to all ages coming that the Lord is merciful and full of compassion ; that He desireth not the death of the sinner, and forgiveth iniquity, that He may be feared.

We all know this. Whence comes it then that the exulting cry, ‘Howbeit I obtained mercy,’ is heard so little even from those who have no smaller grounds to vaunt God’s grace ? Can it be, because the words immediately preceding—‘Sinners, of whom I am the chief’—are still so little understood, so little felt ? Alas, the notes of grateful praise for redemption sound faint, because the complaint of sin and misery lack the deep tones of earnestness ! Therefore God’s grace in Christ for many an eye stands low, because they think too highly of themselves. Without the descent into hell, which is self-knowledge,—bear this in mind,—there is no ascent to heaven in true acquaintance with God’s character ; without the inexorable sentence below, no rejoicing over the reprieve above. Ah ! if each one of us might learn of Paul to judge our own past history as sternly as he, so that the slumbering sense of our great need of mercy, like to that vouchsafed to him, might be awakened ! Might we, too, listen to the gentle voice of our great Saviour with the same reverence as he did, and as faith-

fully obey it. Not the strange conversion, by the way, of Paul, but his true repentance, is required of every sinner; and that is possible, even for the deepest fallen, unless they stubbornly will kick against the pricks; and this is preached by his example, and corroborated by the experience of all believers, after long ages, to the praise and glory of God. But this is certain: in order that we may be able, like him, to praise God from a pure heart fervently, there must be previously much humble prayer.



TWENTY-SIXTH JANUARY.

‘Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. I will; be thou clean.’

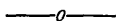
—MATT. viii. 2, 3.

A LEPPER at the feet of Jesus, and His hand stretched forth in pity to the unhappy man! What is it that so attracts and touches us, as often as we pause at this portion of the gospel story? Is it alone the striking contrast between such helpless misery on the one side, and on the other such purity, mercy, and power? Oh, surely also that in secret we think of him with pity to whom such a record is but a stumbling-block, not a support, upon the path of faith, because he, as we fear, is yet a stranger to his own heart, as to the gospel of salvation; but still there is much more. Or is it not so, that the fact as here related shows us a vivid picture of the mortal sickness of our souls, whilst it also points to the cure? But there is no necessity that we should have fallen into gross sin, like the writer of the 51st Psalm, in order frequently to feel impure and leprous, and most heartily to pray, ‘Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin,’ as though the reiteration marked the impression that one bath would not suffice. How has the taint spread to the deepest

veins of our inner life, and how powerless is the endeavour in our own strength to renovate ourselves! 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' Take hence the only pure and holy One the world has ever seen, and to the sinner nought remains but—as is done by far the greater number—to veil his sharpest pangs to the utmost, and die at last in pain. Thank God that there is One disposed at all times to listen to the cry of anguish out of the depths: 'Lord, if Thou wilt;' and once again thank God if we indeed know Him, for then we also certainly have learnt by experience that there goes ever virtue forth from Him.

'If Thou wilt:' but that indeed we need not doubt, for there is nothing He so earnestly, so unchangeably, so unconditionally *wills*, as the cure, complete and perfect, of our soul's disease. He wills thus always, as soon as thou hast given Him the occasion; and this He finds, moreover, where only an impure and disturbed heart, looking away from self and every creature, seeks cure from Him in faith and in humility. And that which He wills, He can assuredly accomplish. The painful jarring between will and power has no existence for this great Physician of souls; and what He can He does, as here through stretching forth His hand, now through the working of His word and Spirit, which removes the taint and crushes the tyranny of the disease. Not instantly does He now cure, but by degrees. On earth He begins the cure, but perfects it above; for there is no leprosy of the soul so deeply rooted as not to yield at last to the healing touch of our exalted Saviour. It is required that we should constantly resort to Him, not only with our first offence and sin, forgiven then, but still with each remaining impurity, which every day still cleaves to us, and really allow ourselves to be cleansed through Him from all pollution of the flesh and of the mind. But do not too many come far short in this? and

might not our Lord oft shame us by returning to us the question, 'If thou wilt'? How few are really willing in full earnestness to be redeemed from every sin, renewed and sanctified, as Jesus wills it! How often we connive at the unrighteousness concerning which we groan so devoutly; yea, bow the knee before the Lord, but not without a sidelong glance towards the world we abjure! Because, indeed, our disease little troubles us, we treat the Physician with some indifference, and seldom give the world the example of really cured and grateful patients. Happy for us if the perception of this impression humble us, and bring us, surely not in vain, kneeling at the feet of our great Master. But above all, happy for us if we thereafter rise and walk in the way of new obedience, and every day, by word and deed, show forth to many that the grace given unto us has not been in vain. Not on us, as in those days at Galilee, has silence been enjoined. We may, we can, we will declare the virtues of Him who brought us out of darkness, and still daily brings us into His glorious and marvellous light.



TWENTY-SEVENTH JANUARY.

‘I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.’—

LUKE vii. 9.

A HEATHEN philosopher once declared it to be the summit of true wisdom, to be absolutely surprised at nothing. But of Him, who called Himself ‘the Wisdom of God’ (Luke xi. 49), we read, that during the days of His flesh He marvelled at least twice: once at the unbelief of the inhabitants of Nazareth (Mark vi. 8), and a second time at the great faith of the Gentile centurion. We may confidently assume

that the Lord saw better and sees better than any one into the heart of man, and that He perceived how much trouble and strife it cost to confide unconditionally in His word; but also what joy ineffable He felt, when finally the last resistance yielded, which a limited understanding and a distrustful heart not readily desists from urging against the claim of unbounded belief. Assuredly also, for the little faith, He had a glance of compassion and sympathy; but for the great faith, He had ready a radiant crown of brilliant eulogy. The great faith, how is it pictured to us from the life in this proud Roman, who from dire necessity sees himself constrained to go to Jesus! He is resolute in coming to ask from Jesus' hand nothing less than a miracle: humble in asking that which, without the express intercession of the elder of the Jews, he durst not hope for: courageous in expecting assistance through a word of power. Compare him only with the nobleman at Capernaum (John iv. 45 onwards), with the distressed father at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration, with the disciples during the storm on the lake,—and you must marvel also at this great faith, but at the same time perceive that the Lord could not possibly refuse the petition of such a suppliant.

There is—the narrative of the centurion at Capernaum shows us this for our instruction and encouragement—*more faith in the Lord than we imagine*. Who would have looked for such a Gentile in unconverted Capernaum: what apostle, even, would have surmised, beneath the garb of Roman soldier, to find a heart so full of faith, humility, and love? But thus it is always: the evil makes much noise, the good grows and ripens silently; the foes of Christ are legion, but His friends, moreover, are far more numerous than the disciples think. Enough! *where faith is found, the Lord marks it at once*. We are offended often at the defective form in which each manifests his faith, and should perhaps have

judged such a believer as this to fall far short because he held peculiar views regarding the nature and manner of Christ's miraculous power. Jesus is, on the point of form, extremely lenient, where only the spirit and essence are not lost. He discerns the good where men overlook it, and—this clearly shines before our eyes—*where He finds faith He values and rewards it.* The centurion departs in every point contented, and still, centuries later, he stands forth before the many Christians of the Gentiles, who read or hear his story, alternately as accuser and pattern in the school of faithful obedience. Can we contrast ourselves in candour with this noble heathen, and not cast down our eyes abashed?

Observe the various judgments on the centurion of Capernaum given in this brief history! We meet him before three tribunals: before that of his own conscience, before the judgment of his fellow-beings, and before that of the Lord. Before the first the verdict is, 'I am not worthy;' before the second, 'He is worthy for whom Thou shouldest do this;' before the last, on the contrary, 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.' The second judgment bears least weight, the first a greater, the third is conclusive. What judgment would be given of us before these three tribunals? and though, perhaps, our fellow-men might praise us, what says our conscience, above all what says the Lord concerning us? The Son of man, when He appears, shall He with many find that faith He vainly sought in Israel? or shall, perhaps, this heathen stand in judgment against many who profess themselves Christian believers?

'Pour forth belief, O Jesus,
Like a torrent in my heart!
Grant me soon, yea, now, O Jesus,
Joy in Thee, that better part!
I pray Thee by Thy truth and might,
For faith in Thee give strength and light.'

—LAVATER.

TWENTY-EIGHTH JANUARY.

'Who went about doing good.'—ACTS x. 38.

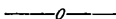
THE *season of Epiphany* is the designation bestowed for ages in Christendom on that period of the ecclesiastical year after the feast of the Three Kings, on to the beginning of the preaching of the Passion; and during successive weeks we are enjoined to the consideration of the manner in which the incarnate Son of God, in ever increasing measure, manifested His glory as the Anointed of God. We gladly follow then, with quickened imagination, as it were, step by step, from the cradle to the cross, and are never weary of reiterating the words of the apostle, 'We have seen His glory.' But is there a passage of Scripture to be found in which the riches of this divine and human life could be better summed up, and which might more fitly be named the compendium of His history, than that which to-day now lies before us: 'He went about doing good'?

Already as a *testimony* this passage is worthy of our attention, spoken by an eye-witness, who here gives back the impression of his own attentive contemplation and experience, on the occasion of the first Christian discourse to the first-fruits of the Gentile world; and that with this result, that immediately Cornelius and his household knelt at the feet of this heavenly doer of good. And well did He deserve this homage, for, rightly considered, what *eulogy* can be compared with that contained in this significant testimony? History has preserved the names of individual princes, to whom she gives the title of Benefactors: thus are held in memory a Ptolemæus Euërgetes, a Titus 'the joy and the delight of all mankind;' but of what 'Benefactors' (Luke xxii. 25) must not the name and reputation dim

and pale before that of the Sovereign of God's kingdom? Does beneficence increase in value when exhibited by exalted persons, from purer motives, in wider circle, with greater sacrifice, to fairer ends? Behold all these united round the image of the greatest of all Benefactors, shining in glorious light! He is nothing less than God's own Son, in the guise of a servant, come to earth in order to minister to sinners, not merely with all that is His, but with Himself. He does it, moved thereto by nothing else but pity and unselfish love, combined with unconstrained obedience to the Father. He does it not to friends alone, but to the stranger, nay, the foe; and not one class of sufferers is excluded: with voluntary sacrifice of time and rest, enjoyment, taste, of honour, greatness, liberty, and life; unbounded, complete, stedfast, and that with no less aim than to establish on earth God's kingdom; holiness its firm foundation, eternal bliss its prospect. Verily, we feel the force of the Christian sage's protest; for the mere ideal of such a God-man, one would suffer martyrdom; and in the present day the heart beats quicker when it deepens and loses itself in this quickening, unfeigned reality.

What a *call* this passage brings us to unswerving faith in Christ as the promised Saviour, the crown and ornament of humanity, God's highest revelation! 'God was with Him!' It is not less apparent from His most blessed deeds than from His life; and he who in unbelief turns from the Lord, can have no pretext for this sin. But what a spur at the same time to a love which yields itself without condition to such a loving Saviour, and henceforth knows no greater joy, than, though at distance infinite, to follow in His footsteps! Many deeds of kindness are asked of us, above all, in the bleak winter season. Oh that we had less reason to blush before the picture of *Christ the Comforter!* Through how much hidden

selfishness, dulness, partiality, caprice, and ostentation are not our kindest deeds disfigured; and how often is the beneficence of the best Christian like to the now increasing and now waning moon, whilst that of Christ is like the sun that spreads his rays unchangeably around! Alas, not only for our evil deeds, but for our best ones, we must ask forgiveness; but this remains the comfort of our hearts, that He, who erewhile went about doing good as Mediator and High Priest, now lives in heaven! His earthly life was as an image of the heavenly, and with our faith and love our hope may also stand firm on Him who yet finds His highest blessedness in doing good even to the unworthy. Let us place ourselves, as with bowed heads, daily afresh beneath these bounteous hands; but also in His power, and through Him blessing others in our turn, we shall go on to greater blessedness!



TWENTY-NINTH JANUARY.

'And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.'—MARK i. 35.

HEART-STIRRING scene, which the evangelist with one stroke of his pencil brings up before us! the Saviour alone with His Father, already ere the sun stands in the heavens; a still morning hour in that busiest of lives! Behold, after a day of constant work at Capernaum, in the first year of His ministry, the night of rest has fallen also for Him. But scarcely does the dawn begin to break, till He forsakes His pillow to seek within the desert refreshing of a higher kind. In solitude He speaks to the Father of all that fills His soul, and gathers strength for the fresh strife to which the new day calls Him. The waste place becomes His Bethel, where, it may be, angels descend, and, their faces

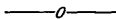
veiled with their wings in holy reverence, there listen to the suppliant. Nor are His devotions ended till the disciples come in quest of Him, and say that already the multitudes seek His presence and instruction. And now He tarries not a moment longer: gladly He turns from His repose back to His meat and drink, anew amidst the toils of life to glorify the Father's name, and finish the work that was given Him to do. Yet who doubts that these early hours of prayer have hallowed the joys and sorrows of the rest that follow them throughout the day? who is not, as he sees the Son of God and man forsake the mount of prayer, again reminded: that, for the disciple, as for his Master, is silent prayer the best beginning of the day?

Assuredly our communion with God is not restricted to special time or place, and 'Pray without ceasing' is inscribed in capitals above the entrance to every school of Christian life. Yet sad experience shows us how, by the want of rule and order in our inner life, our soul's best interests may suffer harm, and many a one who wished to pray only when urged to it by fervent longing and desire, has ended in total neglect of the duty. God is unquestionably to be found at all hours, and in all places, but we ourselves have need of regular communion with Him; and we do not question that the psalmist was not the less pious and devout because he avowed it, and followed it, as his determined purpose: 'My voice shalt Thou hear in the morning, O Lord: in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up' (Ps. v. 3). In the middle and towards the close of the day many things combine which tend to disturb and even to dull the appetite for prayer, and thus seem to raise a new wall of division between us and our God. But the first morning hours, when the head is not yet perplexed, the heart not weary; while so much still is silent which shall soon speak to our sorrow,

and on the other side so much waits which anew shall bring disquiet,—how good it is then, then above all, to be near God, and, as it were, to plunge the soul into the quickening bath of renewed fellowship with Him! That silent morning prayer, how does it deepen our thankfulness for all the good daily bestowed! How does it strengthen our patience under the burden each day brings! How does it hallow our activity in the task which day demands! How does it keep alive our watchfulness against the temptation each day renews! How does it feed our hope of the eternity each day brings nearer! Sufficient unto each day is the evil thereof; but the sorrows of a day confided to God's ear, work together for good; and the morning sacrifice offered to Him in truth, hours thereafter still spreads its sweet-smelling savour through the priest's house and heart. How is it possible to know all this, and yet to be so inert in the holy task of prayer, that even our mode of spending the first hours of the day is sufficient to condemn us before a holy God?

Joy for me, who know in Jesus not alone the spotless pattern, but the perfect Mediator, the Advocate with God the Father for His weak and erring flock! This is indeed to us the fullest comfort that He who prayed on earth still prays for us in heaven. But this comfort must not become an opiate, this assurance a licence to neglect the highest duty. Just when we know the Intercessor with the Father, may we and must we with increased boldness in His name approach the throne of grace, and deeply write these words upon our hearts: 'A day without prayer is a day without blessing.' Ah! of how many of our days may it be clearly seen, that they have been begun quite otherwise than those of our Lord, with prayer; or, if we began like Him, how little did the course and end agree with such commencement! Truly this must be changed henceforth, and it can be

so in and through the Saviour's power. Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us, and lead us every morning, as with Thine own right hand, to the still mount of ordinances !



THIRTIETH JANUARY.

'Lord, teach us to pray.'—LUKE xi.

THERE must have been something in the look of the Lord, whilst engaged in prayer, which awoke inexpressible emotion. His disciples at least, who watched Him from afar in the sanctuary of His solitude, are struck, it seems, although devout Israelites, with the conviction that hitherto they have never prayed like Him ; and an irresistible feeling urges them to ask of Him, that He would teach them how to pray aright. 'Teach us to pray : ' allowing it to be as it stands literally, and they desired no more than a fixed form of prayer, such as a rabbi in Israel often gave his disciples, and as John had also done ; still this form of prayer was asked with a knowledge and design not less honourable to the disciples than to their Master, and nothing hinders us to seek the same with wider application. How much food for thought and for encouragement do these familiar and simple words contain !

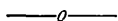
The disciple of the Lord must *pray*. With solemn earnestness prayer is enjoined on him ; but it is, moreover, a felt necessity. Must not the Christian's life be that of a priest ; and are not the prayers of the saints as incense in the heavenly temple ? Even although, which cannot be admitted, the man and sinner could dispense with prayer, the Christian could not, since intercourse with God is his first life necessity, and he, he of choice, sees himself here below called to a task, a strife, a suffering, beneath which he should surely sink if the power of prayer did not anew sustain him.

Were he but more abundant in it! Yet it is not less true, the follower of Jesus must *learn* to pray. Indeed, to pray aright requireth much: an elevation of the mind, an enlarging of the heart, a directing of the inner life, which no man has by nature, and whereto flesh and blood are resolutely opposed. And on the other hand, even the best pray oft amiss, and from the inner chamber go forth against ourselves accusing voices. The truly Christian prayer, in contradistinction to every other, is an ideal which can be only gradually reached. The disciples were devout sons of Abraham, and yet the Lord, on the last evening of His presence with them, could say, 'Hitherto ye have asked nothing in *my* name.'

How needful, then, constantly to remind each other: that the disciple of the Lord must learn to pray *from Jesus*. The true teacher of prayer is none but He. He did and does it, both here on earth and also up in heaven. Here, through His word, which teaches so many noble lessons, priceless beyond gold and silver, for a life of prayer; and, moreover, through His example, which first turned this hour into a sanctuary of adoration. Up yonder, through His Spirit poured forth in the believing heart well pleasing to our God. He teaches prayer even by unuttered longings; and not less through all His guidance of each of His followers, and all His Church on earth, which has no other aim than to bring us always closer to God, and cause us to taste more fully the blessing of His undisturbed communion. Yea, verily, also as the teacher of prayer, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

But thus, too, the inference is easy. Jesus' disciples must always *go to Him* to learn to pray. This is to Him well pleasing, and it is done by none of us in vain. With gladness He receives us when we daily go to His school and seek instruction to pray, not in our own way but in His, which, though for all His followers in the

main the same, in each case somewhat differs. Oh, the Master is so kind, so true, so patient ; but the pupil at times so stubborn, refractory, dull of comprehension. On consideration, we perceive that even the request, ' Lord, teach us to pray,' is uttered by none unless the Father secretly leads and draws us to the Son. But having come to Him, let us not quit the spot, where we in spirit heard Him pray, without a fervent longing to remain His pupils, and to learn to pray *from* Jesus, till at last we pray *like* Jesus. They who so praying live, shall praising die, and triumphing awake in heaven.



THIRTY-FIRST JANUARY.

' And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years : and he died.'—GEN. v. 5.

IS it possible, already the last day of the first month of the scarce opened year? It seems as if last January had lasted longer ; and no doubt, if we live to see another, it will pass away from before our eyes even yet more swiftly. Already during this first month the passing bell has tolled from far and near for friends and strangers ; involuntarily our thoughts turn back to the first death notice—setting aside the murder of Abel—which we find recorded in Holy Scripture. What significant *reminiscence* is brought before us within these few lines!—the death of the first man, of the first sinner, of the first expectant of the promise given in Eden regarding the blessed seed of the woman. Adam had not seen Him save from afar, but had experienced the bitter truth of the sentence : ' The day wherein thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die ;' since that day, life, even in its highest development of power, had become a daily dying, which at length closed in the last expiring breath.

How much sorrow and strife throughout the course of such a lifetime, reaching through centuries, must have preceded that mysterious death; what peculiar sensations must have accompanied it; but also, what quickening and consolation from God must have softened it; what deep impression the contemplation of this death must have made upon his family standing round!

But also for later ages this death merits to be called a striking *manifestation* of the supreme majesty of God. How shines here especially His holiness and justice, but moreover His truth and fidelity, and above all, His wisdom and love! Nay, although this first thread of life was spun through centuries, it cannot last for ever. Although divine long-suffering had delayed the execution of the sentence, no word of it had been retracted: 'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.' It still remains: the tree of life no longer blossoms here below for the transgressor, who has plucked the fruit of sin. Wisely, meanwhile, the life which had been forfeited was lengthened as far as possible; only by degrees the awful power of death must be developed, and for a wide circle the first father of our race must be a pattern, an oracle, a bearer also, and interpreter of God's most ancient revelation. And why should we doubt that the highest love for the first penitent in that wise also had softened the fear of death, and that before this glazing eye, in the misty background, a star of fairest hope has risen?

Not the less it is, and it remains, a solemn *sermon*, which this first name upon the oldest bill of mortality sounds in our ears. Out of the hoary past whispers the voice to us: 'The wages of sin is death,' but also again: 'The free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.' With touching emphasis the dying Adam manifests the inevitable lot that waits us, and the wisdom which we need, in order to count our days with circumspection. What son of Adam lives there

who shall not see death, or who shall free his own soul from the power of the grave? God be thanked that we know Him, the second Adam, who out of death, brought by the first into the world, has taken the sharpest sting. 'For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.' In Him believing, we look back upon the entrance of death into the world with neither bitterness nor fear; nay, we feel thankful that the history of our life on earth shall close, too, with the gloomy notice: 'and he died;' since how terrible would it be for the Christian to be obliged to live for ever in a body of sin, in a world so full of misery, and with no higher prospect in view than this world offers him! May it be only given us, ere the hour of our departure strikes, to ripen for a better paradise than that from which the dying Adam had been expelled! In general, we no longer reach the tenth portion of Adam's age; and this, too, is good, that the time of instruction and of trial has been shortened. But this is only good when we learn truly to spend aright the passing days, and weeks, and months, and daily say to our souls: Make haste to live in the highest, best sense of the term, for shortly thou shalt have lived out thy life on earth. We come but once into the world, remain there only for a brief moment; we never more return, and the stream of death, which has gone forth from the first Adam, flows daily past our feet, and soon will bear us onward in its course. . . . Man, sinner, Christian, mark the end!

'In midst of life we are in death.

The common lot,

It spareth not.

What angel can retain our breath?

Lord, hear our cry!

See not our guilt, but misery,

And snatch us from the spoiler through Thine own eternal pity!'

—LUTHER.

FIRST FEBRUARY.

‘That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye may be rooted and grounded in love.’—Eph. iii. 17.

MUCH have we for ourselves and for each other to ask of God at the commencement of each month, each week, of every new day. But what is more important for every Christian, than that which Paul out of the fulness of his heart desires for the Christians at Ephesus? How much is here asked from ‘the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,’ and that in so few words! Evidently the image is borrowed from the temple of the Old Dispensation, wherein Jehovah dwelt in all the splendour of His glory: thus must also the glorified Saviour find in the hearts of His followers a sanctuary, a fixed dwelling-place, which He shall wholly fill, permeate, and hallow. Thence should it then undoubtedly follow, that *they in love*, that is, to Him, should be *rooted and grounded*: expressions referring to trees and branches, through which the immoveable firmness of their love to the only Redeemer is significantly declared. Such a heart, full of faith and love to Him who is our life! We feel that nothing higher could even Paul ask for the Church, or any Christian for himself and for his brethren desire. That is the *final aim* of all that God in Christ has thus far done for us. Or for what other purpose has He chosen us, who believe in Him, even before the foundation of the world; wherefore, in the fulness of the time, brought us to His wondrous light; wherefore taught us to pray, and on the prayer of the Spirit bestowed upon us faith; wherefore through this Spirit so frequently strengthened us with power after the inward man? All this and so much more was meant to

serve to the attainment of an adorable aim, namely this, that we in spirit should be one with the Son of His love; so that the Son should not merely come to us, but remain with us, and dwell in us, working and reigning through the power of the Holy Ghost. So long as this was not attained, the grace of God was towards us wholly unprofitable; only when faith begins to live within, and love to the Lord becomes unquenchable, may we humbly thank God that His grace has not been in vain.

And again, the aim of all God's ways is at once the only, but also sure *beginning* of that which the Christian must further do or become. Only now do we learn in our measure to *comprehend* (ver. 18), with all saints, what is the length, and breadth, and depth of the building of God; because in the spiritual region love goes before comprehension, and only through faith can we understand somewhat of the things of the new world, which God has created in Christ Jesus. Only then do we learn (ver. 19) 'to *know* the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge,' because through faith we have here personal experience; and since we ourselves know what love is, we may at times perceive something of the unparalleled love of Christ, regarding which the words of the sacred writer are so befitting: 'Many waters cannot quench love; nay, the floods cannot drown it.' Only then, finally, do we become '*filled* with all the fulness of God,' because faith and love within become the source of a new, a truly divine life, which is inexhaustible, and passeth not away.

How desirable above all is, then, this great thing, for which the text teaches us to pray! But how blessed also our privilege, that in this prayer we have to do with a God who (ver. 20) not merely can do all we ask or think,—already that were much,—but 'is able to do exceeding abundantly above it,' and who works in us

power as soon as we become His own. Nay, how high soever the ideal placed before us may be, we need not despair to reach it, because from Him who is our hope shall be also our help. Are we not surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, who tell to us how far men led by His hand may climb the steep ascent? Remember the noted father of the Church, the martyr *Ignatius*, whose name has been for ages referred to on this day in the ancient ecclesiastical calendar. On the question of the Emperor Trajan regarding his name, he had no other answer than that he was called *Christophorus*, the Christ bearer, in whom was fulfilled the promise: 'I will dwell in them, and walk in them.' This declaration cost him his life. According to his own assertion, he was 'as an ear of God's wheat ground by wild beasts, that he might become nourishing bread for Christ.' But through his faith, he being dead yet speaketh, and his example cries to us: The true Christian bears Christ the Lord within his heart. Let then this prayer be ours:—

' Lord, dost Thou delight in grace?
 Lowly I bend before Thy face;
 Dost Thou to me betrothal bring?
 Gladly I take the marriage ring.
 Now for eternity Thou'rt mine,
 To Thee my being I resign,
 To do with at Thy pleasure,
 To Thee, my Lord, as it is meet,
 In life and death, bitter and sweet,
 Thou art mine only treasure!'

—VOET.

SECOND FEBRUARY.

‘ But He said : *Yea*, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.’—LUKE xi. 28.

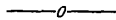
FEBRUARY, the *month of Purification*, on which we entered yesterday, was already so designated by pagan nations, and this present day, which is the fortieth after the festival of Christmas, has for centuries been held in memory by many Christians as the anniversary of the presentation of the child Christ in the temple, but especially for the purification of Mary, when she offered the gift of the poor according to the law of the Lord (Luke ii. 24). To what extravagant height the veneration of this favoured mother of the Saviour afterwards rose, and especially in our own times, need not here be noticed. But may it not be called remarkable, that the very first manifestation of this tendency to exalt His mother as high as possible is by Jesus Himself much more checked than encouraged? The first recorded instance of Mary-worship, as it may well be called, is the exclamation of the enraptured woman in the midst of the company, and which is given in the verse immediately preceding our text: ‘Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked.’ Evidently she is herself a mother, this woman who with entranced devotion has listened to the Saviour’s words, and her soul is stirred to its depths through the power of His discourse. She feels all the happiness of a mother who possesses such a son; she cannot restrain the expression of her feeling. And the Lord did not check the current of so natural and noble a sentiment: He did not ungraciously refuse this tribute to His mother; rather may we say that He reiterated and sealed it. For knew He not, better than any other,

Mary as she 'who kept all these sayings, and pondered them in her heart'? But if Mary is to be the subject of public notice and encomium, it must be especially because she has shown herself the obedient handmaid of the Lord: it may not be without distinct remembrance of that blessedness here upon earth, which surpasses all others, even that of a happy mother. '*Yea, rather,*' says He to the enthusiast, and in her also to us, '*blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it;*' and thus He points to something higher, by which even the privilege of Mary draws back into the shade. And well may He so speak, since just this blessedness is *greater* than any other enjoyed below. Even the highest measure of earthly happiness only avails for this life; but here is question of spiritual blessing as much higher as the spirit is above the dust, and heaven above the earth. Only the hearing and the keeping of God's word makes us truly wise, even where the knowledge of the learned is denied us; truly great, even when we are counted among the mean and humble here below; truly rich, although we scarcely know ought precious which we can call our own.

Yet further, this blessedness is of *more general attainment* than the highest fortune sought and found on earth. The greater some privileges are, the fewer reach them. Not all women become mothers; not many mothers have sons really pre-eminent and worthy of all praise. Only one mother upon earth obtained honour to bear the Sovereign of God's kingdom beneath her virgin bosom. But to hear and keep God's word,—that ought, that may, that can all in great measure, to whom the word of life comes with the blessedness bound up with it,—it is, through the grace of God, within the reach of the most weak, the most unworthy hand.

Lastly, this blessedness is more *enduring* than every happiness which here below causes the heart to beat

with quickened throb. Even the highest bliss grows pale in view of death, and the enjoyment hoped for through many years' duration a few days often dispel like to an idle dream. But the blessedness of those who hear God's word and keep it is fire-proof, and endures faith's hardest trials. It does not sink in the shipwreck of death: it stays with us when light is gone; it is perfected when not merely God's word is heard, but also the glory of the Lord is seen. What had the highest measure of a mother's happiness on earth availed to Mary, and how had she survived the thrust of the sharp sword within her soul, had she not above all heard God's word and kept it? And again, if she had never known on earth the matchless privilege of being Jesus' mother, would she not still have been blessed in her perfect trust in God and in His word? Let, then, what doubtless was in her estimation, and, above all, in that of Jesus, highest and greatest, be the same in ours! Blessed we, who have and hear God's word! But infinitely more blessed still if we in an honest and good heart preserve it, and with the psalmist (cxix. 11) can declare: 'Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.' Even a Mary gives us no cause for envy or for undue praise; let us simply follow in her footsteps.



THIRD FEBRUARY.

'What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?'
—MARK iv. 41.

THUS inquired the astonished mariners when, at the Lake of Genesareth, the Lord had with one word of might silenced the storm, and a great calm succeeded the strife of elements. But so, too, we inquire ever afresh, when we peruse such pages of the gospel, in

which, if possible, even more than in others, the glory of the incarnate Son of God before the eye of faith is manifested, and we now no longer require to be indebted to others for an answer. Rather may it be with us as with Nathaniel, when from Philip he received the well-known answer, 'Come and see;' because in truth, as in the stillness which followed on this storm, we hear the voices which echo the praise of Jesus. Yea, come here and see the *Prophet*, mighty in word and deed, who also through such signs shows forth that He is sent of God, and clothed with more than human power. The scepticism of our age may place this on the list of cunningly devised fables; faith views it by the light of Christ's own declaration regarding His person and His work, and reverently adores even where it cannot penetrate.

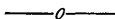
But come here and see especially the *High Priest* of our profession, who shows sympathy with the weakness of all His upright followers, and will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able. Assuredly He censures the fears of stunted faith, yet does He not abandon the timid to their grief and trouble; and even before He calms the storm in nature, He stills the rising tempest in their heart. 'Why are ye so fearful, oh ye of little faith?' No doubt the question was deeply humbling to these timid men, but at the same time it inspired their courage; for it shows that He discerns their need, and will increase their strength.

Thus, too, He manifests Himself as *sovereign* of God's kingdom in all the power of the word,—sovereign in the material world, and sovereign in the spiritual,—whose word of power rules over all wherewith it comes in contact, and finally shall conquer every tempest which may arise within the heart, the Church, the world.

But this threefold crown of Prophet, Priest, and King which we now see adorn His temples, how should He wear it if He were not really partaker of the nature and

majesty of God, whom all must honour even as they honour the Father? He who refuses to hold Him as such cannot, of course, receive these miracles, but Christ and His gospel become to him a problem wholly incomprehensible; and whenever the storms of life arise for him, he has no other choice than between stoical resignation or silent despair. Oh how fortunate the man who is not offended in the Christ of Scripture, and knows in whom he has believed! In truth, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and He who on earth stilled the loud tempest can and will also give to our troubled spirits calm anew. If we have only Him on board our ship, although it may seem to us that He sleeps, yet urgent prayer will not go forth to Him in vain; and often He shows in most surprising manner that He is grieved, when for us without there is fighting, anxious fear within. Ah! why do we at times call for His aid with boisterous impatience, but without due regard to His inquiry, so solemn, humbling, and yet emboldening too: 'Where is now your faith?' Our faith, our immoveable trust on Him and, in His name, on the Father, we can at times so glibly speak and sing of it; but where was it when real trial met us? Where is it now, when we so much require it, and, it may be, have felt such serious shocks? Where would it be, if we should come to find ourselves in momentary peril, as in that hour Christ's first disciples did; and could it stand against whatever storm may rise from inside or without? Alas, if we forgot it seldomer, not the boisterous sea of life, but the inconstancy of our own heart, is now our greatest danger! Our worst foe we bear about with us in our own selves; but, God be praised, our truest friend we also find in Him who may appear to sleep amidst the storm, but is never silent when His disciples cry to Him for safety. He asks not after our faith without again repeating to us the assurance of His eternal truth;

and after each encounter, external or internal, fought in His company, and, as it were, beneath His eye, the last word still shall be as here: 'And they came over to the other side of the sea' (Mark v. 1). Or has He who hushed the tempest not also said to us, that if we believe we shall see the glory of God?



FOURTH FEBRUARY.

'And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him.'—MARK v. 20.

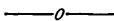
THE narrative of the meeting with the man possessed with devils in the land of the Gadarenes, immediately after the stilling of the tempest, is in the scripture of the New Testament very much as that of Balaam in the Old: for unbelief an offence and folly, and even for faith a problem in many respects unsolvable. Thus whenever, according to the special declaration of the Lord and His first ambassadors, a direct operation of the kingdom of darkness takes place, questions must arise to which it is difficult to return a definite answer. Can genuine pages of the gospel such as this be of slight importance for our instruction and edification, and could they be omitted without any loss? So far from this, there is opened in such passages a rich gold mine for our instruction, our faith, our life.

In contrast to the awful power and night of darkness, into which only a single glance is granted, the Light of the world unveils Himself before our sight in brighter splendour. Here we behold our Lord emphatically the sympathizing Friend of fallen humanity, whom the most repulsive form of sin and misery cannot deter from pity; as the divine Physician for the most inscrutable and desperate sickness of the soul; as the Sovereign also of

the spirit-world, come to destroy the works of the devil, and even with His own hands to unloose the mightiest bands of darkness.

From such a contemplation our faith, receives a welcome confirmation. Indeed, it stands here as though interlined with the story: the power of Christ can save from deepest trouble. He is the strongest ever, even when opposed by the most deadly of the soul's enemies. The cause of Christ triumphed even over the most inveterate opposition. The injury designed to Him and His disciples fell scathless, nay, in the sequel turned to the extension of His kingdom. Yea, witnesses are found to the fame of Jesus even in the periods of deepest corruption; even in that half-pagan district there is henceforth one at least who utters forth His name with love and gratitude, and who will make it known to those who at first prayed Him to depart out of their country. Should not we, after all this, with increased urgency desire that He would come to us, and take up His abode with us? But what an impulse thereto is given by this same narrative, and what a school of life especially it opens up to us! Here afresh it is apparent, that *no injury is so great as that which the soul suffers*. The wretched demoniac, is he not the significant type of the impure slave of lust, who is driven on from restlessness to torment, from folly to violence, and shrinks even from the compassionate Saviour as his worst foe? Praised be God, that He came to deliver us out of every house of bondage; indeed, it becomes here clear as noonday, that *there is no sacrifice too precious if only the soul be saved*. Why did Jesus assent to the petition of the devils, and permit the loss of the herd of swine, except in this way to make it apparent that no earthly possession can be compared with the preservation of a single soul? Oh, blessed truly and for ever they who know themselves preserved through Him, but blessed espe-

cially if we fail not to keep in mind that which, in fine, is preached by the example of the demoniac when cured: *There is no vocation so delightful as his who feels his soul to be redeemed.* Nay, not to forsake our household circle, but there first to testify by word and deed all the great things the Lord hath done for us, and thus to let our light shine evidently before our nearest relatives, He ever calls on us anew. Is thy grateful heart devoted to Him?—this house must be His temple. Is thy mouth filled with His praise?—especially thy daily life must honour Him continually. Not to enjoy all that the heart in moments of high ecstasy desires, but also, like this man, to cheerfully forego what a wise love refuses,—this is the holy calling of every one who, in a higher sense than the external, has desired ‘that He might be with him.’ The Lord sends His redeemed ever anew as from His feet again into the world, first the small world of their own families, in order there to be His witnesses. May His eye to-day not fruitlessly rest on us for the post, which possibly may not be our own choice, but certainly is pointed out as by the finger of Infinite Wisdom!



FIFTH FEBRUARY.

‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’—MATT. xi. 28.

THERE are passages in the gospel of which Luther has somewhere declared, that they well deserved to be fetched from Rome to Wittenberg, crawling meanwhile upon one’s knees. Is not the lesson of the day one of these? ‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.’ What preacher of the gospel, in explaining this invitation, could ever yet satisfy himself?

but, moreover, what hearer is there who has not at least once lent ear to it with yearning of the soul extreme, unutterable? Men, Christians especially, have in many respects an exhausting struggle here below; and whereas our life's ideal at first consisted of a word of five letters—*bliss*, it soon becomes, after disappointments numberless, one letter shorter—namely, *rest*. Sometimes the tear-swollen eye gazes with sad desire towards the spot above, on which 'He giveth His beloved rest' is written. Poor man, who knows no other, no earlier rest than that which the grave promises thee! Lo, here He stands before thee, the great rest-restorer, the *Christus Consolator*, with open arms, and friendly eye, and loving heart, in which there is, oh how much, space for every weary head and heart; and, poorest of the poor, yet room enough for thee! What a matchless self-knowledge must He have borne about with Him! He, who a moment later declared Himself to be meek and lowly of heart, and who here not the less gives a loud echo of the word of God by Jeremiah (chap. vi. 16), 'Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and *ye shall find rest for your souls*.' Oh, certainly He must be either God's own Son in human form, or else what our tongue will not express, nor our pen write down. But who can adequately picture the value and the power of a passage deserving to be called, a gospel within the Gospel? Only consult attentively the voice *of thy own heart*, which requires nothing more, and in itself can nothing less discover than rest, as truly as we are guilty sinners before God, and subject to distress of every kind—nay, doomed to die, God only knows how soon.

Compare with this the voice of *the world*, which indeed promises rest, but least of all can give it, offering intoxication for refreshing—nay, moreover, can but bestow her best gifts on a few, and for a short, uncertain time. Oh, who can marvel at the trace of silent despair.

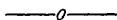
discovered on the countenance of many who have found almost all things on earth below, save lasting rest ?

And now, lastly, give ear to the voice of Christian *experience*, to those who have already found the Saviour's rest, and see if you must not even unconsciously envy their state. Rest in spite of all disquietude in and around, the doubt of the understanding, the accusing voice of conscience, the troubles of life, the fear of death, —how far should many a one be willing to journey, if only certain to grasp this treasure ere he left the world ; and yet that which is sought in vain at such a distance lies here within our reach, and is passed by. No one of us, perhaps, would seriously disclaim it ; but how few personally fully experience it ! Is this because, although men value the promise, they demur to observe the sole condition : 'Take my yoke on you, and learn of me' ? As if this claim also might not be called another benefit ; as if the Master who gathers us within His school were not the gentle, patient, lowly in heart ; as if there could be rest for but one hour even in His neighbourhood so long as the dread yoke of sin, that hard master, still oppressed our shoulders. No, this demand to change our heavy burden for one easy and light cannot be refused, unless we show ourselves as hostile to our own interests as God shows us mercy. Ah, that we felt ourselves more weary and heavy laden underneath our guilt, heaped up to heaven ; and could we lay aside each vain endeavour to obtain the peace, which still we miss, or possibly have lost through our own unbelief, within the restless and faithless heart of the poor world ! Alas, the Lord is ready for the first, and for the hundredth time to give us rest ; but we ourselves are still too little-minded to take it truly, to preserve it undivided, to enjoy it undisturbed ! The world can but faintly trace the token in the disciples, that the good Master had spoken these things to them, that they might have peace

(John xvi. 33). He who has this peace preserves it as a greedy miser does his treasure; nay, as a true son of peace, out of the good treasure laid up in store, he shares with others, and in this, at least, gives himself no rest till he has led his weary brother to that One with whom he first has found the better portion.

‘Happy he who, hidden here,
 All his fear
 May lay on Jesus’ breast!
 Happy he who, pure within,
 Freed from consciousness of sin,
 Feels all his cares at rest.’

—BODDAERT.



SIXTH FEBRUARY.

‘A greater than Solomon is here.’—MATT. xii. 42.

WHERE it is impossible by literal description to give a sufficient estimate, comparison must be employed. Thus our Lord and Saviour has often been compared to the noblest of our race, in order to make more conspicuous His unparalleled worth and greatness. In some degree He has Himself shown us an example of this, by naming in the same breath on one occasion Himself and the most renowned prophet in the Gentile world, and at another time the most celebrated king of Israel, whilst He immediately added that He was yet more than Jonah, yet greater than Solomon. ‘Behold, a greater than Solomon is here!’ What self-consciousness is expressed in this declaration! *How bold it sounded*, this assertion of the despised Nazarene! and this must have been felt by the scribes and Pharisees, who heard them with amazement, but so do we also. Solomon in all his glory, not merely as depicted in the Scripture narrative, but, moreover, as later coloured by

popular tradition. And now to be compared with this great monarch, the humble Rabbi, who had not where to rest His head, and who, moreover (ver. 24), was even suspected and accused in the most insulting manner of being in league with Satan!

Assuredly, such an assertion, on the first hearing, sounds almost incredible; and yet *how true it was*, appeared most clearly that very day, when Jesus Christ spake words of life such as the lips of Solomon had never uttered; yea, this constantly recurs to us when we place His wisdom—which is injured by the idea of comparison—for a moment beside that which drew forth the admiration of Sheba's queen.

What are the problems which Solomon resolved, compared with the grave life questions on which this great Son of the great David alone could find us satisfactory answer? Where Solomon must hold his peace, Jesus may then begin; and where life's wisdom, preached by the sage king, reaches no further than the grave, the gospel of Christ brings life and immortality to light even after death.

Striking maxims of morality Solomon did indeed inculcate by his word; but, alas, by his behaviour, especially during the latter portion of his life, these were more contradicted than commended! Jesus claims perfection; He can even demand of friend or foe, 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?' Solomon's wisdom founds and erects a kingdom of peace; but this, after the death of the founder, is soon shattered, humbled, destroyed. The word of Jesus establishes the kingdom of God, embracing time and eternity, and of which even the golden age of Solomon's glory was but a faint foreshadow.

Solomon's wisdom was admired and celebrated by the great men of his time; that of Jesus, rejected of men, is by God Himself sealed and approved above all others. It has till now triumphantly withstood not only the test

of ages, the proof of experience, but, moreover, the fiercest opposition ; yea, and it shall yet further conquer. All kings shall bow before Him, and countless tongues, with infinitely higher justice than once of Solomon, say : 'Happy are Thy servants, which stand continually before Thee !' (1 Kings x. 8.)

Who that reflects but once does not perceive *how important it is*, this word of the Lord so conclusively demonstrated ? It points our faith to a firm stay, our life to a safe guide, our hope to a glad expectation. Has our Lord felt and shown Himself to be so much superior to Solomon ? how infinitely then must He be more than that which the unbelief of the present age would make Him ! How presumptuous then to reject Him, but how wise and blessed to offer Him the homage of the deepest reverence and the most unbounded confidence ! At times we are in sad perplexity ; we scarce know what to choose, and would give everything to have a wise, unerring counsellor. Christians, how great your privilege ! In Him who is greater than Solomon is secured to us the fulfilment of the promise, 'I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye' (Ps. xxxii. 8). Never can the hope which is fixed on Him allure to too bold expectations. Did the Queen of Sheba see hers regarding Solomon so far outstripped that she exclaimed, 'The half was not told me ;' what may not our faith hope from Him who is greater than Solomon ! A brighter prospect than the delighted princess saw awaits Christ's redeemed ones. To see Him, to be like Him, who on high infinitely transcends the greatest glory of Solomon—assuredly, whatever bliss we can imagine is comprehended in this word. May it in God's good time be perfectly fulfilled in us !

SEVENTH FEBRUARY.

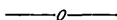
'Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.'—MATT. xiii. 18.

NEVER man spake like this man. Where is the truth of this testimony shown more apparently than in the beautiful parables of the Lord; and which of these is better known and more esteemed than that of the sower, which is to-day our lesson? Well does it merit to be here read with reverence; for it sets before us in a striking form the image of the Lord Himself as the Great Sower, and of the reception, during all the days of His flesh, prepared for the gospel of the kingdom on different sides. Does it not give us to behold, as in the brightest mirror, the various ways in which the preaching of the gospel has been received throughout all ages, throughout the world, in every country and in every circle? Is not the fourfold quality of soil depicted here present at all times even in the smallest congregation; and may not the human heart be called a field, where in one place the seed is strewn on the highway; there it has fallen on a thin layer of earth; and yonder, again, the thorns and thistles have sprung up and choked the good seed? Alas, we know it only too well, that 'cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word,' and what fatal results, even in opposition to the most powerful gospel preaching, are effected through this. Men often think they cannot paint the devil black enough: the Lord represents him under the mild figure of the fowls of the air, against which no one seeks to guard, but which, nevertheless, steal that which was not sown for them, but for the Lord of the field, and which shall now no more bear fruit. Hearts which remind us

of a definite portion of the parable of the sower are met with everywhere; yea, even the Christian, who at first had heard the word with joy, and had borne fruit unto eternal life, how does he still carry with him something of this fourfold character of soil! There is in him good ground in which the seed successfully takes root and springs up; but, alas! how many hard spots, where a portion of the seed is trodden down; how much superficial feeling on many points, under which inflexibility and hardness of the deeper soil is hidden; how many worldly cares and sorrows, through which the heart devoted to God loses its culture, and the full development of the seed scattered so freely is hindered and restrained! Also, to this it is to be ascribed that so many bear of fruit but thirty-fold who should produce sixty and a hundred fold if they but better cared to root out thence the thorns, and give the greedy fowls no access to the unwatched field. And had thus even the followers of Christ much to reproach themselves regarding their relative unfruitfulness in good, why need we marvel longer that to the children of this world words of reproof so often seem an idle sound?

Nay, what a mournful picture the parable exhibits to us! Three-fourths of the seed was lost, and of the last fourth portion only a third bears fruit abundantly. And yet, once more, how true to life the picture: how much the work of grace is by our own fault wholly or partly lost! Well may such a lesson urge us to serious self-examination and deep abasement, as we further recollect how all the honour of the fruitfulness belongs to God, whilst, on the other hand, the guilt of barrenness and sluggishness in good is ours. Alas, by nature we are all like the unfruitful field: good, well-tilled, fruitful ground we may become, but only by the influence of the preparing, searching, patient grace of God! Let us be thankful that we experience this so constantly, and let

us see to it, that we receive it not in vain ; but are we then also, though we have not at first been wholly without fruit, yet resting content with scant measure? To strive after sixty and a hundred fold of fruit to the glory of God, and to the blessing of ourselves and others, is an ambition allowed to every Christian. To him that hath shall be given ; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have. To us, as to His first disciples, has the Lord appointed that we should go forth and bear fruit, if at least we truly believe in Him ; and we know this, Herein is the Father glorified, that we bear much fruit ; it may be that the hundred-fold is seldom gained ere we reach heaven ! And bear we fruit for heaven, then shall we, too, become each in our turn within our sphere industrious sowers : let us strew with bounteous hand the good seed where we can, without dismay or loss of courage, though it seem lost on many a spot. Every Christian life is like a seedtime and a harvest ; but as regards the first, we are responsible only for the fidelity, not for the success of our attempt, which, however, shall in God's time never be wholly lacking.



EIGHTH FEBRUARY.

' Let both grow together till the harvest.'—MATT. xiii. 30.

HOW different the present state from the original condition of the kingdom of God, and how speedily has the Church of Christ lost its first lustre ! Yea, verily, the parable of the tares among the wheat shows us in many respects a picture of it, placing before our eyes a striking exhibition of our holy calling. The mixture of tares and wheat in the field of the Lord *exists* ; that even the briefest glance at history and ex-

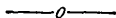
perience shows us. The fear of God at Bethel and the vanity of Bethaven, are only divided from each other as by a thin wall of partition; one roof not seldom covers a wife who loves the Lord and a husband devoted to the world, or *vice versa*: a Christian in name and one who is so in reality often seem alike, even as in the field in Palestine the good and bad wheat grew together, and could not at the first be separated. To what was this appearance due? The Lord has both in the parable and its explanation expressly shown it. 'An enemy hath done this; he who sowed the bad seed is the devil.' Nay, moral evil is not from God; it is even less included in the first scheme of man's condition: it owes its origin to a mysterious power, which had apostatized from God, and which by His high sufferance developed its fatal influence also in the Church of Christ. What marvel yet that the appearance of the tares causes the servant of God disquietude; that, often disappointed and dismayed, he smites his hands together; that he, giving ear to the first natural impulse of his heart, should seek with eagerness, according to his knowledge, to part the tares and wheat! But the ways and thoughts of God are not as ours.

It is His will that wheat and tares should grow together; and without doubt, *it is good* that such a combination, though only for a time, *subsists*. Indeed, a definite separation by human means on this side of the grave is to His servants with the best will, from their imperfect vision, quite impossible: how frequently should they mistake essence for show, or show for essence, and be here too lenient, there too harsh! The separation would be, moreover, fatal to the tares, which at present by their association with the good wheat may still become improved and changed; for here is the difference between the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of grace: tares of the field are tares eternally, but tares in

the Church may be transformed to wheat; and for this end, among other means, the Lord employs this outward combination of good and bad; and not seldom the beneficent influence of the first effects the change desired upon the last. Nay, even for the good wheat also a too precipitate division is not to be desired; just through the outward union with the children of darkness the children of the kingdom are revealed, purified, formed, appointed to more abundant blessing.

And, finally, this union *shall not subsist for ever*. There comes, the parable declares with touching force, there comes an hour of awful revelation, an hour of final separation, an hour of righteous judgment. That which was in time of blossom forbidden to the servants, is in the harvest commanded to the reapers: 'Gather *first* the tares;' thus speaks the Master, as though He would Himself now hasten that which as long as possible has been deferred: 'but bring the sheaves into my barn.' Oh, day at once of terror and of glory, where shall we be when the great separation is made, and whereto are we ripening—for the heavenly barn, or for the fire that never shall be quenched? 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,' so ends the parable. Ah! if it taught us above all to judge with caution of others, but with jealous strictness of ourselves: here not to seek to hasten that which the Lord wills to be deferred: not to expect from the field that which the barn alone can yield; and daily to draw profit for ourselves from the long-suffering with which the great division is delayed. Alas! if we deceive ourselves with false persuasion, and whilst still tares in heart, hope for the fate of wheat! But, moreover, how great shall be the joy, when once the good sheaves, separated wholly from all that harmed them here, and gleaming in the bright harvest sun, shall be borne home with shouting of the reapers! 'The harvest is the end of the world,'—may this be

less forgotten each day in the time of sowing and of blossom!



NINTH FEBRUARY.

‘And Herod sent and beheaded John in the prison. And his disciples came and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.’—MATT. xiv. 10-12.

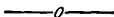
THE pathetic end of him who prepared the way of the Lord may be contemplated from many interesting points of view; and if we turn our eyes upon the different persons concerned in the event, the whole deserves to be designated a dreadful revelation of the power of sin. But is it not also, nay, specially, a striking proof of what seems dark and obscure, and yet is really wise and beneficent, in the dealings of God’s providence? In truth, thus has it ever been: round about God’s throne not seldom are clouds and darkness; it was then vindictive fury and licentiousness uncurbed won fatal victory over woful weakness. *Who* dies here? The innocent, the mighty witness of truth, who more than once has touched the consciences of these his murderers. *When* does he die? In the bloom of life, after he scarcely had laboured for a year at his great task. *How* does he die? As sport of an atrocious whim, whilst over against the table of the prince, as once erewhile at Belshazzar’s festival, no finger writes upon the wall the doom of the oppressor. *What result* has his death? His followers are dispersed, the work is incomplete, wickedness alone triumphs; where is here the God of judgment?

And yet, as we reverse the page, how does it still appear that here, too, judgment and righteousness are the foundation of God’s throne? Just the same particulars which drew forth our first astonished questions, on

nearer contemplation give us ground to adore God's wondrous ways. The *man* who there dies fears not sudden death. He is prepared; and the very cause of his death spreads his renown, because he falls a victim to his bold discharge of duty. The *time* he wrought was short, but long enough for him who had declared concerning himself, that he was not the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, the voice of one that cried. The *manner* of his death is touching, but for himself no grief; one sharp sword-stroke, and from its prison-house the bold spirit wings its flight to realms of freedom. Of him assuredly it may be said, as afterwards of Stephen, 'He fell asleep;' and what earth took away, heaven gave again with interest. The *fruit* of his martyrdom was not loss, but gain, to the kingdom of God, because at least a portion of his followers were at once won for Jesus; and when the lighted taper has been extinguished, they can thenceforth, without distraction, direct their gaze towards the Sun of Righteousness. Thus it is seen here, too, how He who has no call to answer for His deeds can explain all; and how the ways of God in many respects disclose a depth, nay, but beneath this a depth of riches, of wisdom, and of knowledge.

Would it not be good also to let our eyes rest sometimes on such apparently terrific pages of Scripture, when we frequently see so much occur around us which might almost justify the question: 'Doth God know, and is there knowledge with the Most High?' Nay, even a calling and a character like that of John is no warrant for a quiet life and a peaceful death; even a head like his may fall unlooked for, with affecting swiftness. The word 'indispensable' stands only in our vocabulary; it has no place in that of Providence. Yet it remains certain and sure. There is a difference between those who serve God and those who serve Him not; and finally, John in his prison is happier than

Herod at his lascivious board. God takes vengeance, even where He does not speak; the murderer of the prophet of repentance shall thereafter learn this in fearful fashion, and the new charger placed on his table cost a fearful price. He had corrupted all things, yet had frustrated nothing in the course of God's adorable plan of government; and whilst his royal state is long ago forgotten, John's martyr-crown shines yet in undimmed splendour. Oh, let us then learn silence, where God's way is veiled in cloud, and wait the issue of His working; but let us above all follow the footsteps of the sorrowing disciples of John, who, girt in sackcloth, found no better counsel than at once to come to Jesus! To Jesus hie, all ye who feel so bitterly that ye wander in darkness and perplexity! The gospel of Christ alone solves in our sight the problems of God's providence. Reclining on the bosom of the Son, we there learn best to comprehend the Father's ways, and under sorest chastisement to kiss the rod. Happy we, who have no distant journey to come to Jesus with our unanswered questions. We know beforehand what the Spirit of truth, with whom we are in fellowship, shall say to us: 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know *hereafter*.' The eye falls on this 'hereafter,' and even in the darkest dungeon a friendly sunbeam from above descends.



TENTH FEBRUARY.

'In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit.'—LUKE x. 21.

THAT the Lord's public life on earth might almost be called a life-long suffering, and that God's incarnate Son was, in the fullest sense of the term, a man of sorrows, cannot be doubted. Yet we should err, did we suppose His life was never brightened by a sun-

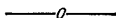
beam of real joy, or that, in fine, an old tradition touching the Son of man rests on truth, 'that many had often seen Him weep, but never seen Him smile.' The contrary is shown to be the case by the significant recital of Luke regarding the exalted and glad disposition of mind with which the Saviour saw the return to Him of the seventy disciples, whom He had some time previously sent forth as preachers of the kingdom of God. Nay, their account of the triumphs which had from the beginning attended their mission, was not received by Him with cold indifference. In the small victory He beheld the germ of the great, in the present the omen of the future, in the first-fruits the pledge of a harvest yet unseen. The eye, which otherwise might gaze so sadly round Him, now turns to heaven with joy and gratitude. The heart, too full for silence, vents itself aloud in glorifying God. The countenance of the fairest among men is brightened as by a sunbeam from the opened heaven. All who surround Him on this memorable occasion receive at once the deep impression: 'At this hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit.'

Of how great importance is this apparently insignificant narrative for the right knowledge and appreciation of *Christ* Himself, as well as of the holy vocation of the *Christian*! It brings us on the track of many tranquil pleasures, which the Saviour *then* enjoyed on earth. Or can we doubt His satisfaction when He, in midst of strife and of misjudgment, saw Himself followed and believed in at least by individuals? When He beheld the woman of Samaria hasten to Sychar, or mused on the great faith of the Gentile centurion; when He discovered a true son of Abraham in Zaccheus, or even on the cross heard the repentant murderer's prayer,—then must He not, even amid the deepest agony of soul, have tasted for one moment, if no longer, joy unspeakable? Since centuries exalted to glory ineffable, He is now

above all suffering ; but still the text ever exhibits the faint but faithful image of the joy which the God-man, seated at the right hand of the Father, *now* proves. When He, through whom the good pleasure of the Lord was brought to pass, beholds the kingdom of God come with power, sinners turn from the errors of their ways, the powers of darkness gradually fail, who can then doubt that He rejoices in the spirit, and who can express how great the joy *shall be* whene'er the prayer is fully granted : ' Father, I will that where I am all those may be whom Thou hast given me !'

Yet, in order to come there, His people must follow Him ; and how lovely is the light which this page of the gospel sheds on the vocation of every *Christian* ! The Christian's life—it is as though interwoven with the text—needs not be cheerless and gloomy. ' The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord ' (Isa. xxix. 19), and he who knows the Lord may triumph even here in His name and fellowship. Only the Christian's joy must be like that of Jesus—pure, holy, and God-glorifying ; a joy which does not separate, but leads to God and heaven ; a joy like that which He Himself expressed on this occasion (ver. 20) ; especially for this, ' that our names are written in heaven.' Ah, what can be at all compared with the Saviour's holy gladness, numberless as are the pleasures of the world ; and how must even the Christian for his happiest hours on earth continually seek pardon ! Scarce can we tell which is most strange, the worldling's childish joy, or the absence of all real happiness in the lives of those who call themselves disciples. Ah, if much laughter shall be turned into heaviness, there shall be also many griefs changed into the calm joy of faith ! Nay, it is not enough for us to praise and admire the holy gladness of our Lord. We must in our turn heighten them, by seeking and occupying our place among the children and the simple ones, for whom

He thanked the Father. We must especially, though it should be at distance infinite, yet follow them, and commend our faith to others by a cheerful walk and conversation. So shall we already here, in fellowship with Him, 'feel happiness eternal born within,' and at last receive this welcome: 'Well done, good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your Lord.'



ELEVENTH FEBRUARY.

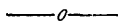
'Jesus wept.'—JOHN xi. 35.

THE shortest verse of the Bible; but is there one which places the image of the Lord before the eyes of His disciples in a more amiable, and, at the same time, in a nobler light? He had just been led to the grave, where Lazarus His friend is laid to rest, and in deep emotion He stands there, surrounded on the one side by the Jews from Jerusalem, on the other by His faithful disciples and the sorrowing sisters, over against the closed and silent tomb. He speaks no word, but silent tears bedew His benign countenance, and the sight deeply impressed even the Jews present. It had been asked wherefore He wept, and the bystanders marvelled that Jesus should weep at the tomb of a departed friend, since in a few moments He could bring him back to life. And, certainly, such tears as we are called to shed at sight of the last resting-place of those whom we have lost for ever on this side time, such tears as these could never glisten in the eye of the Redeemer. But, on the other side, could He behold the sorrow of the sisters, read the unbelief and murderous hatred in His foes' hearts, and see how the King of Terrors had cut down with ruthless scythe His well-beloved friend, and not be filled with strong emotion which must bring a

mist before His eyes? Precious to us are these tokens of humanity, for they are the tears of the *Partaker* of our nature. Unbelief has frequently asserted that Christ, as John depicts Him, was only man in seeming; but already the verse of our text demonstrates to us the contrary. A writer of fiction who had wished to portray a merely superhuman being, would surely not have shown him weeping at the grave of a departed friend. Thus must an actual human heart have beat within the bosom of the God-man; and by His tears we know Him as the sympathetic *Friend* of His friends. Nay, He comes not merely, like the impassive comforters from Jerusalem, to proffer empty words; His tears display the feelings of His heart. He literally suffered with the weeping sisters, and it soon appears His love is not content merely to sorrow with them. Oh, well might even the Jews exclaim, 'Behold how He loved him;' but the Christian, how can he open such a gospel page, and not see here the type of the compassionate *High Priest* in heaven, of whom, to our eternal consolation, it stands written that He has compassion on our infirmities? Compassion: yea, verily, that one word is the key to all the glory of Christ's appearance, to the secret of the whole work of redemption. Compassion caused God's Son freely to choose the poverty of earth before the wealth of heaven; compassion made Him step by step encounter all the distresses of our fallen race; compassion made Him bear all the sufferings of those He cured as though they were His own (Matt. viii. 17); compassion made Him take upon Himself the sin of all the world, under the weight of which He groaned upon the cross of Golgotha. Compassion speaks again in the first word the risen Saviour utters in our hearing: 'Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?' And what a compassion is that of this large-hearted Son of man, compared with which the sympathy of the best earthly

friend dwindles to nothing! Our compassion is often powerless, His almighty; ours weak and partial, His equal to His holy earnestness against unbelief and sin; ours shortlived and fickle, His patient and eternal, since He is still the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

How much better is it to know that He has compassion on all our infirmities, than to experience in richest measure the love and pity of our fellow-men! Nay, His friends have never to complain that they are now alone in the world, with none who can perceive or comprehend their pains and struggles. He who weeps here yet ever bears the wants and suffering of His people on His heart of love undying; and He does not blame our tears when life or death snatches from us some treasured possession; since, from His own experience, He knows the soreness of our wounded hearts. What consolation! but also, what a lesson! Could it be possible a Christian should bear within his breast a heart so cold and insensible to others' woes, that though he may rejoice with those who do rejoice, he scarce can weep with those who weep? Let it not at least be found with us, for whom also this passage has been written (Col. iii. 12): 'Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering.' Let us abound in deeds of kindness, but at the same time be moderate in our demands on others, and, above all, never expect from the best earthly friend that which the heavenly One alone can give.



TWELFTH FEBRUARY.

'*Why stand ye here all the day idle?*'—MATT. xx. 6.

IF rest is an indispensable requirement for soul and body here below, labour is not less the daily task of life in things secular and religious. Yet *all* work, which

is serviceable and befitting in itself, cannot therefore bear the name of really Christian. A zealous, active disciple of Christ is he alone who responds to the call to go and work in the Lord's vineyard, of which our parable here speaks. How much is there to rouse us and shame us in the single question therein directed to the slothful: 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?' It is as if all must unite to call those to a better choice who otherwise would waste their best hours in the bustling, restless market-place of life.

Why stand ye here all the day idle?—*the vineyard which awaits you is so spacious*; it is no less than labour for God's kingdom in its full extent: first of all in our own heart and household, but then, moreover, in the community for the Church of Christ, for the spread of the gospel,—for all, in a word, which may contribute to speed the coming of the reign of bliss with power and glory. To one within this vineyard is entrusted the breaking up of the ground, to a second the planting, to a third the pruning of the branches; and whilst some must bear the heat of mid-day, others again are called to work in the cool of the evening.

But to no one is it permitted to remain within the market-place of vanity in idle sport or dream; neither can any, for such waste of time, plead this excuse: 'Because no man hath hired us.'

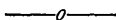
The Master is so kind; He goes out in order to seek labourers, and sends each of them in His good time to work. Some already in the morning hour, the type of life in its spring; others, first at the sixth and ninth hour, the type of riper age; others again at the eleventh hour, when the evening of life is far advanced, the night of death already close at hand. Who could hesitate to listen to such an urgent, such persistent call?

But the reward is so liberal, which, by the Lord's own promise, the labourer in this vineyard shall receive, and

in His service the reckoning is so just. He who blamelessly has laboured shorter than the others obtains a like reward with him who earlier was called ; he who has borne the burden and heat of the day will most certainly never be sent away with empty hands or niggard payment. The Lord rewards without exception all of His servants, however varied their task and occupation ; and whilst the base greed of gain is put to shame, an honest deed, nay, even the will to do it, is generously requited. Truly, it is well not only to be zealous in His service, but, as far as practicable, to make haste ; and what has been neglected, to introduce more speedily, since already time is consumed.

The time for working is so short which here below is meted out to us ; was it not already the eleventh hour, the one next to the last, that heard the question of the parable : Why stand ye here all the day idle ? We know it even without the reminder ; men cannot reckon on seventy or eighty years before they hear the stroke of the eleventh hour, the presage perhaps of the twelfth ; also in the middle, or in the morning of our day, the night of the grave can fall upon us. Well, then, whilst we yet have time, let us lend ear to the Lord of the vineyard who oversees our work ; let us enter the vineyard, cultivate the fruit, and specially take heed that our eye be not evil towards our fellow-servant, whom we perhaps, not without seeming justice, deem more highly favoured than ourselves. What is really right shall each of us receive ; we may, alas ! indeed ourselves do wrong, but cannot suffer wrong at the Lord's hands. With Him is no respect of persons, and it may be those who were counted here among the last shall in the end appear in His estimation among the first. Let us be silent, then, even if we bear the burden and heat of the day ; we obey a Master in whose service no single drop of sweat is spilt in vain. Let us for this alone be careful that the

humbling question shall not surprise us: 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?' Alas, it is so sad an evening when work hours have been lived through in vain! Blessed is the servant whom the Lord on coming shall find so *doing*. He shall, instead of stern reproach, receive much more the approval: 'I know thy works and charity, and service and faith, and thy patience and thy works; and the last to be *more* than the first' (Rev. ii. 19). That which is right shall he receive, although yet saying from the depth of his soul, To grace alone be the glory!



THIRTEENTH FEBRUARY.

'And he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not.'—MATT. xxi. 30.

IN the parables of our Lord there now and again appear personalities so striking and so true to nature, that they may often be regarded as permanent types of humanity. Is it not so with the well-known son who now stands here before us? Ah, what a difference between him and the prodigal son, who not only expressed the most holy purpose of reform, but who at once fulfilled it. How unfavourably does this young man appear, even beside the other in this short narrative, who at first refused obedience to his father, but afterwards came to a better mind! Here we have nothing but show without substance, promises without fulfilment, a good beginning without a satisfactory end. Yet this mournful figure does not merit merely a glance of contempt, but at the same time of observation. He is a striking image of thousands, earlier and later, and his reply may be termed the summary of the greater portion of good intentions.

Yes; well does this presage express the real history of so many intentions, which throughout all times have

been resolved, or at least expressed with liveliness, to serve the Lord and to labour in His vineyard. How many examples of this same apparently good yet fickle disposition does the history of the Israelites exhibit ; how many others are added through the experience of each day ; nay, even the conscience of many a professing Christian, how must it constantly condemn him, whenever he tries himself by the measuring-line of his own best intentions ! Alas, what inconsistencies in ourselves ; what wide discrepancies between knowledge and will, between will and action ; what countless subterfuges, whenever it must come at last to the going forth, to the working, to the denying of that sinful *Ego* ! Well might Luther declare that the way to hell is paved with pious resolutions ; well might Paul ask the Galatians : 'Ye did run well ; who did hinder you, that ye should not obey the truth ?'

And yet how *easily explained* this history of unfaithfulness to God and to ourselves becomes, if we will but examine whence most intentions spring, in what manner they are usually carried out, and above all, how many things concur to frustrate them most miserably ! How often it appears afresh that the liveliest impressions are in no wise the deepest ; how much may the influence of time, the cares of life, the force of our surroundings, cause our goodness to be, in the language of the prophet, 'as a morning cloud, and as the early dew which swiftly passeth away' ! (Hos. vi. 4.)

Yet can nothing which here serves for explanation stretch to complete excuse ; and it ever remains a *mournful* history which is brought before us in that eternal 'I go, sir,' followed by the record of stubbornness implied in the 'he went not.' Does it not in itself bear humbling testimony to man's sin and weakness ? Is such repeated breach of faith to a voluntary and holy choice not perfectly incompatible with all true godliness ? Yea, do we not thus expose ourselves, if God prevent

not, to constantly increasing danger of contempt, of hardening in sin, even of complete reprobation? Alas, the vineyard may readily find other hands to labour in it; but certainly we shall not so soon find other task more attractive, more grateful and soul-elevating, than this. Let us therefore no longer, as perhaps already too long, rest satisfied with a respectful 'I go, sir,' which means nothing, and but heightens our own condemnation. According to the infallible declaration of the Lord (ver. 32), even publicans and harlots, the insincere in heart, are before those who are inexhaustibly rich in promises, but meanwhile continue to walk in the old paths. It is better, according to the saying of the wise man of Israel (Eccles. v. 1-4), not to vow, than to vow and not to pay. Yet certainly it is far the best not to rest until, in perfect uprightness before God, we can with the psalmist testify: 'I thought on my ways, *and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies.*' None of us shall attain to this so long as this morning and evening prayer is not heard from the depth of our hearts: 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew *a right spirit* within me.' The un-renewed heart is the disloyal, fickle, capricious heart; only when sanctification has commenced through the Spirit of grace shall it be uniformly, permanently, humbly watchful, and know that it constantly carries about in itself its most dangerous foe. God forbid that the last word of the story of any one of us should run: 'And he went not.' God grant that all of us may not merely promise to go, but really come and work, and not leave off; at the last, although at infinite distance, may be able to say, like Jesus: 'Father, I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have *finished* the work that Thou gavest me to do.'

FOURTEENTH FEBRUARY.

‘And he (Bartimeus) said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.’—LUKE xviii. 41. 42.

IN the abundant treasury of gospel narratives we meet with individual ones, which, with the fullest justice, may be termed a gospel on a small scale. May not this be said in reference to that glorious scene beside the gate of Jericho, upon the occasion of the Lord’s last journey to Jerusalem? and is it possible to give attention to the narrative of the blind beggar without perceiving, as in a mirror, the image of our own redemption?

The *misery* of being without Christ, how strikingly it is represented here in this poor man, who, surrounded by the most glorious scenes in nature, has no sight to view their brightness, whilst the multitude around him deeply compassionate his condition, but are entirely powerless to cause one ray of light to shine upon his darkness!

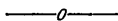
The *way* to Christ is shown to us by this blind man, who scarcely knows the name of the Saviour, yet all the voices in his heart, which have so long cried for help, have at once become strong, and now he will not permit any one or any thing to divide him one moment from his Helper. Oh, that deep feeling of self-misery, that eager faith in the Saviour’s power and love, that unconditional obedience which sprang up in the blind man’s breast soon as the friendly message meets his ear: ‘Be of good courage; rise, He calleth thee!’—Poor Bartimeus, how rich art thou become upon the way; and we who read this, how great things should we already have experienced, if a disposition like to thine were less unknown and strange to us! Alas, we often, as it were, wrap ourselves in the garment which this beggar cast aside; we suffer with

indifference even the Lord to pass us by, as did the bustling crowd within the city of palm-trees ; we let the first and best put us to silence, if, even, we had actually begun to call upon the Son of David to have mercy on us. Is it wonder that we still remain equally blind of sight and unrenewed in mind, as months and years before ? For judgment has Christ come into the world, according to His own word, 'that those that see not may see, and that the seeing may become blind.'

The *salvation* in Christ, prepared for those really like-minded with this blind man, stands also here again before us in type and figure. The anticipating love wherewith He stoops to greet the poor man with the reassuring question : 'What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee ?' He manifests also to every heart, whereof He knows, with certainty infallible, that it is crying to and for Him secretly. The saving power shown to Bartimeus He glorifies continually, when He, through word and spirit, not only kindles the light for the eye, but, moreover, opens the eye to the light, and, in the literal sense of the words, 'leads the blind by a way which they have not known.' The inestimable sentence of approval which crowned the miracle : 'Thy faith hath saved thee,' speaks yet in every heart to which the Holy Spirit gives assurance of eternal life ; it is never wholly absent where the voice of conscience testifies that the heart is upright before God. Oh, how does it appear here also, that we have a merciful, almighty, faithful Lord in heaven, of whom it may be testified at all times : 'He shall save the needy who call upon Him, the wretched also, and they that have no help' !

Nay, the *homage* to Christ, paid to Him by all whom He hath saved, can be no less than that which we see brought to Him by this redeemed one. Bartimeus forthwith follows the footsteps of the Lord : he glorifies God, as we expressly read : he gives thereby a blessed

example to all the people who behold him, and soon their hearts become attuned to the same holy exercise (ver 43). Oh, potent preaching, through something more than words—through deeds; but oh, sad contrast with so many dispositions in and around us of those called Christians! We ourselves, whom finally shall we resemble? The multitude who let the Lord pass by without receiving from Him actual blessing, permanent impressions? or the blind man to whom the personal touch of Jesus was the great life question? And if indeed this last, what is our faith and obedience, our following Thee, and pressing forward before others? Do Thou Thyself open our eyes to the full depth of our misery; but, moreover, to the riches of Thy grace, and to the glory of our calling from above!



FIFTEENTH FEBRUARY.

‘ Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? ’—JOHN x. 32.

MISJUDGMENT: the word is so easily uttered; but who can suitably describe the pain this treatment must have caused the heart of the Holy Jesus, at once so pure, so tender, and so sensitive? A glance into that heart is granted us through the question in the text, which places us already in the last period of His public life, at the winter feast of the restoration of the temple, merely a few months previous to the Passover of His suffering. What remarkable images does the question call up before the mind, whenever we pause on it attentively, and try, moreover, to read the soul of the questioner!

First of all there passes by us *Israel in their deep blindness*, which they had exhibited not only at this hour, but also before and after it, and, alas, still continue

to exhibit. The loftiest expression of the self-consciousness and the pastoral fidelity of the Lord are answered by the Jews—so it stands literally (ver. 32)—by taking up stones lying there at hand, in order to put the presumptuous fanatic to death in the court of the temple. That in so doing they offended the Lord of the temple, nay, undermined the sanctuary, not one of them conceived. Thus was it then, and also afterwards, and even at the present day; when the exalted Christ manifested His kingly glory before the eye of earth and heaven, Israel remained with covered visage.

On the other hand, this same question shows us the Lord in all His heavenly greatness. Of misjudgment ye do, indeed, hear Him complain; but how has He deserved it, and above all, how has He borne it? He had done absolutely nothing which in any respect justified the enmity of the Jews, and with perfect right He can assert: 'they hated me without a cause.' He went about continually doing good, and that, too, in a manner which only merited gratitude and praise; without arrogance, without parade, without partiality, to all men, everywhere, at all times. The misjudgment of His love He suffered, without His heart becoming thereby embittered, without His hand being therefore withdrawn from the work, without His even disarming the foe, who took up stones against Him. His voice is choked with tears, but still no bitterness is heard in the tone of His inquiry: this only He desires to know, by which of His good deeds had He especially deserved the death of stoning; and finally, this great misjudgment of the 'Welldoer' becomes past remedy, and Jesus dies for a world that could not rest till it had broken His heart.

But is the matter widely different now from what it was in those pathetic hours? nay, is not here exhibited, as in a bright clear mirror, the image of *the world in its stubborn ingratitude*? That the Head of the Church,

even from eternity, continues to show many good works 'from His Father,' is taught us by daily experience: the best possessions of mankind they owe to Christ. In the Spirit he still passes through the land that bears His name, blessing, and doing good: of the spiritually blind He opens the eyes, the spiritually dead He raises to new life: what 'excellent works,' men might almost inquire, can He do more and greater, that the world at last may see and believe? Alas! the hatred of Christ by many is only equalled by the fear of Christ by others, who as much as possible withstand His blessed influence. Truly this is a great question: Should the Lord a second time, as at Jerusalem, enter and speak in the same manner as He spake in the temple, would not the world once more take stones to put to death the disturber of their false peace? Can they not do so at the present time? The arrows of their scorn they hold as little back as the smile of their contempt for the Lord and His cross; and the hostility which they can no more gratify on the glorified Head, they now reserve to spend upon His living members.

From this knowledge and experience, what must be the duty of the disciples of Jesus? It is evident the *Christian in his high vocation* stands here in the full light of day before our eyes. He has to make amends to his master for the misjudgment of the world by heightened homage, increased faith, abundant evidence of love. But, moreover,—to bear the world's contempt against the Lord as a portion which he cannot escape, if he would be truly faithful. Misjudgment—which of us dare speak of ours, once he has seen Him most worthy of belief, the most misjudged of all? But oh! if we are permitted for Christ's sake to suffer scorn and reproach, then of God's grace and power may we receive much of that meekness, resolution, courage, which in this question of misjudged love so strikingly speaks forth?

SIXTEENTH FEBRUARY.

‘ Let us also go, that we may die with Him.’—JOHN xi. 16.

THUS hear we Thomas, called Didymus, in tones of the deepest melancholy, but at the same time of most fervent love, exclaim to his fellow-disciples, now that it is evident that the Lord will not be restrained by any consideration of caution from the dangerous journey to Judea, where enmity should soon prepare for Him the most terrible destiny. But may we not also repeat this passage to ourselves and to each other in a different sense, now that we have again reached the eve of the seven weeks’ annunciation of the passion which, according to venerable ecclesiastical usage, has been for ages held in honour by the Church? Assuredly not in public only, but also in the privacy of the inner chamber, should this suffering be called to mind; and the impulse which the passage of our text gives us to go hence, and in spirit with the Saviour to die to the world, has for the heart that knows and loves Him a deep and pathetic urgency.

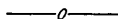
Certainly it is a *painful* death this passage points out to us, heard and obeyed in all its power. Death is one of the ideas to which one is not easily accustomed; and if even temporal death is an image of terror to us, how much more is that inward, spiritual death, that dying to sin and to the world, to which the gospel of the apostles calls us, and to which also the Lord directs us when He says: ‘ Whosoever will find his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall find it’! To die with Christ, in fellowship with Him, and conformity to His death, so that the old man shall be as it were crucified with Him, dead, and buried, that says yet more for a heart bound to the world by countless

ties. And now, voluntarily, uniformly, perfectly to go forth to die with Christ: to go hence, when God calls, into our Gethsemane, to climb our *via dolorosa*, towards our Mount of Crucifixion: we feel it dimly, but deeply; all declares, that not merely is this the highest, but also the most difficult requirement in the province of spiritual life, and flesh and blood may on an impulse of this sort say: Impossible.

Yet it is an *inevitable* death of which we speak: a death to which, sooner or later, every one must come who shall in truth be called disciple of this Man of sorrow. Without such death there can be no life *through* Christ, because as truly as His spotless sacrifice alone is the ground of our acquittal before God, so firmly is it bound therewith, that this sacrifice has alone for us redeeming power, when we have entered into closest fellowship with our crucified Lord, and there can be no speech of this without death unto sin. Without this no life *for* Christ: whoever truly can repeat this saying: 'The life that I now live, I live through the faith of the Son of God,' must first have learnt to comprehend this saying: 'I am crucified with Christ.' Without this, finally, there can be no life *with* Christ, when once this world with all its glories has disappeared for ever from our eyes; for again, to quote from Paul, only 'if we have been planted with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall be so likewise in the likeness of His resurrection.' All that Christ has done for us, in fine, what avails it if He does not live in our inmost soul; and how is this last possible, if sin, as before, lives there uncombated?

And why should we oppose this heavy claim, since this painful, this inevitable death, if well considered, may yet be called a *blessed* death? Life is only beautiful when the many ties which have bound us but too long to sin and to the world are broken: there is no loss, but gain, to be expected by following the way of Thomas.

Suffering will only become light in proportion as we are weaned from self, and even the thorn in the flesh will then be found a sharp but salutary nail to fix the old man firmly to the cross. Nay, even the going hence is blessed, since it becomes an absolute dying to sin; and of the Christian it may be affirmed with boldness, the bitterness of death is passed: 'That which men blindly term death is but to cease to die.' Ah! if for any of us it might be once for all! When are we dead to sin? Then only, but then certainly, whenever we are no longer wanting in that holy earnestness, in that sincere belief, that fervent love, and that determined choice especially, which expressed itself in the words of Thomas, and found an echo in the hearts of his fellow-disciples. With these words we see them soon thereafter follow the Lord upon the way that leads to death, but yet, moreover, to life; and we who gaze at them, 'let us also go, that we may die with Him!'



SEVENTEENTH FEBRUARY.

'Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.'—JOHN xiii. 1.

AS the Gospel of John in so many respects exhibits a special character, so, too, his description of the last sufferings and the bloody death of the Lord has something quite peculiar. Already the opening, as we perceive in the text, breathes a tone solemn and sublime: evidently the beloved disciple is about, not merely to let us gaze upon the Lord's dark path of suffering, but, above all, to read deep in His heart. It is as though the song of praise we heard at the commencement of this glorious Gospel still resounded, but now in a voice broken with tears.

‘He loved them to the end.’ Yea, this might be the worthy *title* of the whole History of the Passion, which the sanctuary opens afresh before our steps. When was ever love like that of Him, who laid down His life not merely for His friends, but for His foes? and who cannot, at least in some degree, imagine the emotion within the heart of John, when, in his hoary years, all the memories of this most sacred evening of his life here culminated? There opens now before his inward vision the upper chamber of Passover, with its never to be forgotten scene of parting: then comes in view Gethsemane and Golgotha, with all that lies between: now is recalled to mind the many words, the many deeds, of the suffering and dying Master for him, for Peter, for his fellow-witnesses; and all the tones of this great Anthem, old, yet ever new, unite in this one chord: ‘He loved them to the end.’

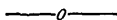
But this same passage, may it not be called the summary of the earthly, the unchanging history of the heavenly life of our Lord? Yet who of His disciples, looking back on the beginning of this harmonious whole, would have received an impression different from that of the beloved disciple? which of us, placing himself so many ages later before the wondrous picture of His life, suffering, and death, but feels that this total impress—forgive the term—speaks longer and more loudly than any other? Yea, verily, all His life was love: His suffering was fellow-suffering: His death a sacrifice of such priceless value, because it was not destiny alone, but the highest act of love, which at the cost of His own life sought only our salvation. And here may it not be, moreover, the highest vaunt of faith, the highest consolation of life, that His loving heart was broken on the cross, solely that it might henceforth, upon the throne of universe, beat ceaselessly for the salvation of mankind, for the happiness of His people? Oh, certainly, He who thus

loved, still loves; and as He passes by none with indifference, He yet embraces His own with special care. Death cannot quench love: no distance of time or place can limit it: no unfaithfulness on our side can blunt it. Those who were in the world: 'He knows well how much of strife and suffering is included in that one word *world*; He well understands how His own people often feel as orphans fatherless,' nay, in the fullest sense, most miserable of men, if they by hope against hope had not clung to the cross and Him: but in and opposed to this world of instability, of sin, of suffering, He gives and permits them this consolation, that He has loved them, yet loves them, *will* love them, whoever else may fail them or oppose them: though it may cost them labour not to despise and not to despair of the salvation of their souls. He alone shall still remain, when life or death has parted us from our last friend on earth: paths entirely solitary while bearing the cross, and deserted deathbeds, have no existence for Christ's disciples. Glorious gospel of the unbounded, the unquenchable love of Jesus for each, for all His people, in whatever spot of earth they dwell!

But what a powerful *motive*, then, to all of us who know Him, to let it be seen that these things are something more than a melodious sound—a motive to ascribe thanks to this love alone for all that by God's grace we are, and in eternity shall be! The love of Jesus for His people is the burden of a song of which eternity itself shall never hear the close. What motive to anticipate much from this love!—no niggard gifts, but rather royal presents; no mere consolations, but constantly renewed manifestations of the thoughts of peace which lurk there in that immortal heart of love for the happiness of His disciples. What motive, above all, at least in some degree to become something—ah, why so little?—for and through this love! Even as long-suffering, disinterested, compas-

sionate as He, and towards the close of life not to be colder, more penurious, but more cordial in showing love, so that on our departure hence we leave no other impression behind us, than that we, too, loved to the end.

‘Oh, love while yet you may,
 Whilst strongly beats your heart.
 The hour shall come ; perhaps to-day
 From your nearest you must part.’—FREILIGRATH.



EIGHTEENTH FEBRUARY.

‘Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.’
 —MATT. xxvi. 10.

‘NOW when Jesus was in Bethany,’—is there more necessary than these words of Matthew, at once to bring before the eye the most beautiful picture? For Bethany, we know, was the favourite resting-place of the Lord, who otherwise had no single spot where He might lay His head ; the habitation of the noblest friendship ; the theatre of His glory, who recently had set forth and exhibited the resurrection and the life. Now we encounter Jesus on the last Sabbath of His life of humiliation on earth, at a feast which at once to our feeling bears the character of a farewell meal. The Prince of Life sits there, next him whom He had raised from the dead ; the leper cleansed, not far from his Saviour ; Mary and Martha in the immediate neighbourhood of that peerless Friend. And now we see a homage rendered to the Master, touching and beautiful in itself, but doubly striking, when in it we view a manifestation of grateful love to Christ, to whom she offers a noble gift, receiving in return a high reward.

This homage was *prompted* by the warmest gratitude,

which glowed in Mary's heart at thought of the immeasurable benefit she had received. What shall she render Him who to her arms restored her brother from the dead? how show them what a special place He occupies in that believing, loving heart?

It was *exhibited* with a readiness, a delicacy, a munificence above all praise. She waits for no suggestion from others, but follows the impulse of her own mind; no gift is offered to the Lord, but a sacrifice; not only costly spikenard, but, moreover, the broken flask of alabaster; not the head alone was anointed, but also the feet; with no linen cloth, but with her unbound tresses does she dry them. Evidently her love must cost her something in order to fulfil the impulse of her heart; she does not consider how little will suffice, but, on the other hand, how much she can perform; she would give yet more if she were able, and in the gift bestows with tranquil joy herself.

Who knows the world so little, as not to perceive how in their bosoms such show of love will be misjudged? Something wiser, something more frugal than Mary's love-token the Judases will ever find, especially when the largeness of her gift shames their selfish reckoning. How many of the poor might have been succoured with the money which so prodigally she lavished upon Jesus! how much more wisely would affection act, never to show itself except with scales in the one hand, a count-book in the other! Yea, Judas, thus it appears, and thus, though thou wert blindly ignorant, thy judgment seemed so just, as to mislead a moment the well-intentioned but short-sighted disciples. But thank God, the Lord beholds with other eyes, and counts with other ciphers. Man judges the heart according to the deed; the Lord the deed according to the heart: the world misjudges the highest and the best, and understands extremely well the art of letting fall upon the noblest

blossoms of a glowing heart the chill sleet shower; but Jesus comprehends what none else can, and He defends the act of love, the worth of which He only penetrates. Poor Mary, thou seest the longed-for hour arrive, and lo, thou standest now accused of wrong before these brave and kind-hearted disciples! Nay, exalted Mary, on whose dishevelled locks Jesus Himself has placed a crown of glory, which the hands of all the Judases on earth shall never pluck away: 'She hath wrought a good work on me, she hath done what she could.' Oh, say against how many thousand pennies should the spikenard of such eulogium be weighed, which still, centuries after, fills the house of God with its sweet odour? As a prophetess, impelled by highest aspiration, has Mary her King anointed to the death, and she now receives a princely recompense.

Her simple deed became *immortalized* through a prediction without parallel; and still, after so many centuries, her name at each announcement of the Passion is commemorated with honour: 'Wheresoever *this* gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world.' What a foretaste of triumph, even before the struggle has commenced; but also what reward, and what a lesson for the life of love in the kingdom of God founded by Christ! Who of us, although he bears no more a Judas heart, must not cast down his eyes before this Mary? Who must not raise them to Him, who showed and recompensed such love, with the deeply humble prayer: Ah, Lord, Thyself anoint me with the Spirit of life from above, in order that I may rightly learn to love? Who can count any sacrifice too great for Him, who out of love gave Himself for us?

NINETEENTH FEBRUARY.

'And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?'—MATT. xxi. 10.

ON the next day' (John xii. 12), after the anointing at Bethany, the entrance into Jerusalem took place; an incident at first sight so amazing, but at the same time so full of significance, that not only on Palm Sunday, but also yearly at the commencement of the announcement of the Passion, it captivates our notice. We can easily understand how such unwonted spectacle brings all Jerusalem into unwonted tumult. Yet once again for Jesus' sake all the city was moved, as more than thirty years before it had been by the coming of the Eastern Magi (Matt. ii. 3). 'Who is this?'—so questions one the other, and doubtless to this present hour the replies given vary as much as ever. The more our reason rejoices, that with our higher light it is not difficult to find the right one. 'Who is this' (so we too question), who there, 'not borne on glittering wheels of gilded chariot,' but in calm simplicity riding upon a humble beast of burden, comes from Bethany, and enters Jerusalem in midst of a rejoicing multitude?

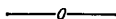
Before all things, the *Promised One of Israel*, who in this important act fulfils the saying of the seer: 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee; lowly, and riding upon an ass' (Zech. ix. 9). At a later period His disciples remarked, with reverential astonishment (John xii. 16), how even this trait of resemblance with the ideal of the Messiah of prophecy was not wanting; and with them we see in the Lord, in this crisis of His history, the expectation of antiquity fulfilled, and the long promised Sovereign of humanity appear according to the counsel of the Father.

As the Prophet of Nazareth we hear Him in the same hour greeted by the multitude (ver. 11), and in the highest sense we ascribe this title of honour to Him. His prophetic knowledge, even of the hidden and apparently accidental, He had recently shown by His preparation for this entrance (vers. 2, 3); and how He who is mighty in word is also the same in deeds, the enraptured multitude declared, when they glorified God aloud for what they had seen performed by Him, especially for the resurrection of Lazarus (Luke xix. 37; John xii. 17, 18). Take away the miraculous from the history of the Saviour, and the enthusiasm at His entrance becomes another problem in His life. Who is this? we know it, Christians, and higher ascends the song of our praise, because here especially He reveals Himself as the *willing Saviour*, who voluntarily and openly takes the last steps on the way to Jerusalem, that is, approaches His death's doom. Nay, not for a moment does He deceive Himself in regard to the feeling of the multitude; He weeps not, nor complains at sight of the city, which stubbornly passed by those things which belonged to her peace! As certain as of the destruction of Jerusalem is He of His own death on the cross. He might remain behind; He might save His life if He desired; but the command to lay it down was given to Him by the Father, and now the fearful tragedy of His bloody death is near at hand; nay, now He shall not a second time, 'as it were in secret' (John vii. 7), go up to the feast; openly the Lamb draws near the slaughter-house; the foe may know that He is coming, and shall know what He shall do for these.

Over palms and rushes He makes His way to the cross, and through the cross to the throne; how is He here made manifest as the *Founder of a spiritual kingdom of God!* Nay, His kingdom is not of this world; this stands, as it were, interlined in this page of the gospel. Not on the proud war-horse, but on the humble beast of

burden the son of David treads within Jerusalem ; no swords are here drawn, but palms are waved in His honour ; not over corpses, but over garments lies His course ; whilst not war-cries, but loud hosannas peal. Not with force and violence comes He to reign, but through the mild power of His love ; and who can doubt if He shall at the last be victor ?

Yea, verily, *the future Conqueror of the world* now passes here before us in solitary unique splendour ; and His entrance into Jerusalem becomes an image and prophecy of His course through the world's history. Lowly, gentle, compassionate, but victorious ; just where He seems lost, so He goes forward, from age to age, from land to land, city to city ; His followers poor, and low in rank ; whilst even His foes are forced continually to cry out, ' Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing ? behold, the world is gone after him ' (John xii. 19) ! And thou, my soul, art thou prepared to follow Him ; hast thou consented to be conquered by this surpassing, all-subduing love ; and in whom dost thou perceive thine image ? In the foes with all their stubborn malice, in the multitudes with their shallow and short-lived jubilation, or in the disciples with their obedience, their joy, their faith ? God forbid that with regard to any one of us the cry of ' Hosanna ' to this King should be upon our lips, only to change ere long into the ' Crucify him, crucify him, ' of Christ-rejection !



TWENTIETH FEBRUARY.

' He knoweth that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.'—MATT. xxvi. 2.

THUS rings the last manifestation of the Passion, which at the same time forms the passage from the Redeemer's work as Prophet to that of High Priest.

With the impressive announcement of Jerusalem's coming fate, and the great judgment of the world, He had closed His first-named office ; but now, when in the shades of evening He forsook the Mount of Olives, perhaps whilst with His disciples beneath the starry heavens He pursued His way to silent Bethany, He there repeated once again that saying which filled their hearts with anxious care and grief, predicting to them in the clearest terms the time and manner of His death.

What an infallible *foreknowledge* speaks in this announcement ! Have not hosannas echoed to His honour ; has He not to-day and yesterday returned as victor from each fresh conflict with the foe ; has but one finger been stretched forth openly against Him or His disciples ? And yet, 'after two days,' thus He maintains, with a clearness which none can misunderstand, with a firmness which endures no contradiction, and when the disciples still perhaps dream of an earthly throne, He knows Himself to be journeying towards a cross.

With what *calmness* He begins quite of His own accord to speak of His approaching destiny, and to join to the announcement the declaration of the public manner of that which then was known to none !

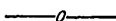
With what *wisdom* he armed the disciples against the contest which their faith must undergo in the dark hours to come, and with what faithful care He points to them a ray of light even there ; all was foreseen and all foretold !

But above all, what voluntary *obedience* and *love* unparalleled, causing Him thus to choose that which He knows and foresees, and therefore may avoid, as He already has so frequently escaped the eyes of all His adversaries ! 'The Son of man shall be crucified ;' thus rings the saying, which speaks at the same time the most sublime self-consciousness ; but no sigh accompanies, no complaint embitters the discourse ; the victim is ready to be offered even before the executioners have contrived

how to sacrifice Him. It gives us no surprise that unbelief endeavours, with pertinacity most obstinate, throughout the gospel history to get rid of such predictions of suffering from the Lord Himself, and to place them at a later period on the lips of His followers; but too brightly beams the glory of His divine and human nature for men ray by ray to dim the diadem of light around His brow. Here, too, faith beholds a majesty too high to be exaggerated; and where it bends in deepest reverence before the suffering Son of man, adores, especially in the fulfilment of this prediction of suffering, a *divine providence* which reveals and glorifies itself notwithstanding, nay, just in and through the free actions of men.

But who does not remember how, almost at the same time (ver. 3), an assembly of the foes of Jesus took place at which schemes are devised diametrically opposed to the prediction of the Lord? 'Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people;' with this determination the band of conspirators issue from the palace of Caiaphas. 'Just on the feast day;' thus it stood written in the book of eternal wisdom, and the word of the Lord is true. Not in secret, but openly; not with subtlety, but with force; not when the festival was over, but on the day of the Passover itself, the true Paschal Lamb is offered; and not of constraint, but voluntarily shall the foes themselves assist the undesired result, when a few hours later Judas enters their hall of meeting, and thus all is changed. Thus they co-operate unwittingly to fulfil the words of Jesus, 'signifying what death He should die;' and the Passover sun shall not go down before it is anew made evident that the counsel of God shall stand, and that He shall do all in His good pleasure. Nay, the last thread of the marvellous tissue of His history, God be praised! not in weak human hands is laid; and never have the followers of Jesus cause to fear their Master

shall prove a liar. Like this shall all His words be truth, and the result shall show that He to eternal ages may be called 'the Faithful and True Witness.' Oh, with what trust upon the guidance of this Shepherd and Overseer of souls may we yield ourselves, since He perceives our weakness and necessity as clearly as He once foresaw His own approaching doom, and knew the wants of His first followers! With what calmness may we, as many as believe, trust our own future and that of God's kingdom to the eternal providence of God shown here afresh! nothing by chance, and further, nothing without an aim. We know not what awaits us within two days, not even two hours or moments; but though we should have the heaviest cross to bear, this we do know, the day of death shall be to us a heavenly festival when we shall sleep in Jesus; and who knows, perhaps we too, as the hour approaches, shall be enabled to speak of ours as calmly as did the great Forerunner and Finisher of the Faith, two days before His death.



TWENTY-FIRST FEBRUARY.

‘What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you?’—
MATT. xxvi. 15.

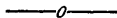
A FIRST step is always important, and often dangerous; but where was ever a first step taken on a path more guilty or more fatal, than at the beginning of the accursed conspiracy between Judas and the high priests? Ah! what blacker page in all the history of the human race than that on which stands written this, ‘What will ye give me?’ Who is it speaks? ‘One of the twelve,’ as he is constantly with touching pathos called; one called to be an apostle, now an apostate from his high vocation; the man who, it may be, had

capacity to have become an angel, and yet has sunk to the condition of a devil. For what price was this base treachery undertaken? For a miserable handful of silver, the contemptible price of a slave; the reward for which innocence was devoted to death, and a soul to damnation; this covetous man had not even waited till he was asked: 'What must we give you?' he himself comes forward with the question: 'What will ye give me?' this is negotiated before the hideous bargain is concluded. And under what guidance do we see the fatal treaty established? Even had the evangelist not told us, we should have already guessed it; here was in full force the power of darkness: 'Satan entered into Judas Iscariot.' Poor Judas, what did it then profit thee, if erewhile in the name of Jesus thou didst cast out devils, and didst many mighty works, since at last thou hast thyself become the prey of the wicked one! Nay, wicked Judas, who thus with thy own hand hast signed thy sentence, and chosen hell rather than heaven! Who can think of this, and yet not tremble before the dark depths which lie hidden in the unfathomable heart of man? Who can read it without anew perceiving how most unsatisfactory is a merely outward relation to Christ; how fruitless even the best religious opportunities; how dangerous, in fine, the highest aim, if the *heart* is not really right before God? Oh heart, oh world, oh money, for which so much is bought and sold, which on a death-bed shall yet be repented! Well may the prayer of the psalmist be daily ours: 'Incline mine heart unto Thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.'

And yet again, what a sublime page in the history of the divine revelation of salvation is this which here lies open before the enlightened eye of faith! For, once more, who was it who was thus delivered by a sinner into the hands of sinful men? Who but the spotless Holy One, whose glory shines reflected on us just in this

black night of treachery! No accusation can be brought against Him,—no power which feels itself sufficient against Him,—the foe must have recourse to treachery, and not even the mouth of the traitor can find fault with Him. He had long before discovered in the heart of Judas the germ of evil (John vi. 70), and had done all to arm him against his besetting sin. He knows, too, what is in this man, but He *allows* Himself to be betrayed without His holy calm being thereby disturbed, the unity of His will with that of the Father being broken, or His love being diminished towards a world which had brought forth such snake-like hatred. And why all this; and under what foul influence did this confederation of wickedness take place? We know why Christ *must* suffer these things, especially who it is who thus permitted the kingdom of darkness unhindered to plan its own destruction. Just when Satan was rejoicing over the success of his schemes, he must at once perceive with trembling that such a victory will complete his overthrow, and from the greatest crime ever committed, arose the greatest benefit to a lost world. How unsearchable are the ways of God, and His judgments past finding out! Oh, when we so frequently, as here, see cunning and violence go hand in hand for the overthrow of the highest and the best; when it sometimes seems as if all were permitted, and absolutely nothing was longer restrained by Him, who yet had only to speak and the power of evil must yield; when, in one word, literally all seems against us,—then let us write deep on the tables of our heart: ‘God reigneth, and His counsel shall stand, even in the night of treachery.’ But let us then watch and strive, though also in His power, against every act of unfaithfulness to our holy calling as Christians; and when the Man of Sorrows, who has bought us not for silver or gold, again appears before our inward vision with the question: ‘What wilt thou give me?’ let it be

still our daily answer: My heart, Lord Jesus; but not the half—the whole; the heart eternally devoted to Thee. Subdue it fully, pierce it ever deeper, transform it so entirely and perfectly, that not for all the treasures of the world would it again be parted from Thee and from Thy love, and thus preserve me lest I should be lost like this son of perdition!



TWENTY-SECOND FEBRUARY.

The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples.—MATT. xxvi. 18.

HE who should wish to write a treatise on the value of the small matters of sacred history, might, especially in that of the suffering and death of the Lord, find more than one evidence, that even the seemingly unimportant have their own significance. For instance, on the occasion of the last Passover (vers. 17–19), a proof as striking as important may be obtained of the greatness of our Lord in little things. How many traces are there of this greatness, which to the observing eye are displayed in a few words!

We see here a *simple arrangement*, but just therein an *unlimited obedience*. The Lord knows all that awaits Him, and how at once in His blood a New Covenant shall be established. What would have been more conceivable, than that He should have held Himself above the prescriptions of the Old, and have said to His disciples: Take ye part in this feast; I have other food than this paschal lamb! But no, even on the last evening He remains faithful to the first word of His public ministry: 'Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness;' and even when on the eve of the greatest sacrifice, He does not fail to eat of the prescribed Passover.

An *obscure hint*, but evincing *infallible knowledge*, appears here in His words. Yet His disciples only half comprehend the significance of the touching 'My time is at hand;' but when immediately they see the man bearing the pitcher of water appear at the spot indicated, they cannot doubt at least that here there is something more than an accidental meeting—that it is a mysterious appointment. Thus here also lies the smallest as well as the greatest matter connected with the execution of God's counsel for our salvation, naked and open before the sight of Him who chooses what He shall bear, and knows what He shall choose; and the eye that saw Nathanael under the fig tree, and sounded the heart of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, had, even but a few hours before death, lost nothing of its clearness.

Over two of His disciples He exerts *special guidance*, but just in this displays *minute and exact care*. Or why have charged John and Peter with this mysterious commission, if not to guide them specially to submissive faith and unquestioning obedience even without comprehension of the command? Why so carefully weigh His words, and omit the name of the chosen master of the guest chamber, if not to keep the secret from Judas, and thus to secure the undisturbed peace of the upper chamber of Passover, where this evening so much was to be done, and spoken, and prayed for the eternal blessing of His people? Thus literally every word, every step, is here weighed; and when we take a comprehensive grasp of all, we see a *touching preparation*, but just in this a *calm unparalleled*, coupled with obedience and self-denying love. Or tarries He not at this moment still in peaceful Bethany; can any one constrain Him to go thence to Jerusalem against His will; has any of His foes the smallest power? Yet He sets forth to the feast, that is, to certain murder. He speaks as calmly of His death as if it concerned another; and thus here too shows

that He loved His people to the end ; yea, that He wills to be the Saviour of a guilty and lost world. Even from eternity that Thursday evening had been predicted ; but still we cannot consider the most trifling incident regarding it, without being constantly constrained to repeat : Never man spoke and was silent, walked and acted, like this man !

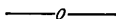
Of extreme importance is the proof here given of the Lord's greatness in small matters. It manifests Him anew as the *complete likeness of the Father* ; as verily the Son and Heir of Him who in small things perhaps shows most His greatness, and who dwells on high, yet looketh down on all the inhabitants of the earth.

It stamps Him as really the *perfect Redeemer* of the world ; the willing, but at the same time the all-sufficient Saviour. Just such a willingness, such obedience, and such fidelity in the smallest things are required in the High Priest who must make atonement to God for the sins of the people.

And how are we taught here at the same time to know Him as *the best guide of His people* ! As for the second time, He brings each of them into the school of faith, which is most necessary and best suited for them ; and even as little as here does He now scorn that trust which without questioning obeys His nod.

Most assuredly, He specially deserves that we unceasingly regard Him as *the highest example for imitation*. How much seldomer should we stumble, how much more prosperously advance, if for us, as for Him, faithfulness in little things were something more than a vain sound ; if we more constantly performed our duties, both small and great, with His word in our heart : ' My time is at hand ; ' if, in a word, His motto were at all times ours : ' Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God ! ' Even the little wheels we see here in the great timepiece are as necessary as the strongest springs : the Lord employs

both apostles and water-carriers to accomplish His adorable design. Where is the upper chamber where He shall celebrate the feast of redemption with all His people? Yet there is room for all the faithful; and even the forgotten water-carrier, who loved and served Him, finds there prepared the wine of joy eternal.



TWENTY-THIRD FEBRUARY.

‘ And Jesus began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.’—JOHN xiii. 5.

WE speak of contrasts, but could one be found stronger and more surprising than that which is here found in the Gospel of John: Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God, riseth from supper and—ascendeth heavenwards?—nay, ‘ laid aside His garments, and took a towel and girded Himself, and began’ . . . We all know what now follows; but where is the poet, the painter, or the orator, who has ever in any degree, according to its merits, succeeded in depicting the scene of the washing of the disciples’ feet in its unparalleled beauty, or in sounding its exhaustless depths?

Already of itself, as a striking *example* of ministering love in its voluntary self-abasement, and, moreover, in its unapproachable greatness, it occupies even in a Gospel like this fourth an entirely exceptional position. Oh, how it must have appeared to the eye of a John, when the Lord silently rose from the table at which the old strife about rank had again broken loose: how all looks were at once directed toward that quiet and yet expressive action: how the stillness of the upper chamber becomes yet stiller, when the refusal of Peter is at once

heard and checked! Then comes the Master also to John, nor does He pass by Judas: then He again sits down, for the touching ceremony is ended, and the last foot of the last disciple is now dried, and Himself breaks silence by this question, 'Know ye what I have done unto you?' Verily, these are things which would not have entered into any heart of man to conceive, had not God Himself given them reality and life; and if any man at sight of such calm majesty, combined with such condescending, forbearing, persevering love, does not feel irresistibly constrained to kneel in spirit on the threshold of the upper chamber, I would not change conditions with him.

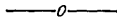
But how much more brilliant rays of light beam here, when we see in the washing of the disciples' feet the outward *emblem* of the glory of Christ's appearance and the blessing of Christ's reign! Or what else is this simple act, than a renewed manifestation, a summary as it were, of what an apostle of the Lord reminds us: 'Who, being in the form of God, emptied Himself and took on Him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'? He who with light, as with a garment, clothes Himself, now lays aside His heavenly vesture, and girded with the badge of servitude, makes His whole life one act of love, which from no sacrifice shrinks back dismayed. Oh, well might He in that same hour exclaim: 'I am in the midst of you as one that serves!' He was so this evening, but not then alone: at the end of a life, and at the beginning of a suffering like His, such an act of humility as this washing of the disciples' feet stands just in its appropriate place. Nay, the disciples too must know it: this self-abasement is yet not the end, but the beginning merely, of a humiliation lower and deeper. He who here performs a slave's task shall immediately thereafter bear the slave's cross, and shall not draw back His feet

from being stretched upon the accursed tree; and He shall die, that we may live through Him.

And is this washing the disciples' feet not also the emblem of the eternal, inestimable benefit for which we have to thank His self-abasement; and is there a disciple of the Lord who does not understand and assent to this saying of His: 'If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me'? Nay, no less aim contents His love; than to cleanse us from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, even from the remaining perverseness which constantly cleaves to the cleansed, as dust to the feet of the wayfarer. Ah! why are we upon this point so frequently like Simon Peter, refractory, and in our own conceit and selfwill would direct the Lord's way, instead of being led by Him and cleansed in the manner He deems best for us? Blessed, indeed, that in the Head of the Church we possess a patient and compassionate Saviour, who bears with contradiction, and disarms it: even the Judases are not without the tokens of His love; and with all in His ways that seem enigmatical, still ever the same word of consolation unspeakable is repeated: 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.'

Well were it if we did not so often overlook the *example*, which in this act Christ, by His own declaration, left to His followers! Is it necessary, is it possible to sum all the occasions, in the community, in the household, above all in the heart, on which the incident of the feet-washing becomes a sentence of condemnation inevitable? Yea, this act of humble ministry is sometimes imitated, yet where so *followed after*, that the world in us may recognise the disciples of this Master? Ah! the hidden pride even in our show of lowliness; the ineradicable selfishness even in the work of love; the little-minded jealousy, where in one point only we should strive for the first place, namely, which of us shall show

most of that greatness which consists in coming down, in serving, and in following! 'Lord, not alone the feet, but also the hands and the head;' but above all the heart, wash and purify it all through Thine almighty power, and form anew, henceforth, Thy holy image in our life!



TWENTY-FOURTH FEBRUARY.

'He then (Judas), having received the sop, went immediately out; and it was night.'—JOHN xiii. 30.

TWO nights are specially remarkable in the history of our redemption: the night in which Jesus was born, and again the night in which He was betrayed. In the first, the light descends from heaven; in the second, the kingdom of darkness attained a short-lived but dreadful triumph: and well might John significantly term the hour of the discovery and departure of the traitor an hour of the night.

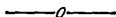
The *shadows* of this night, how dark they are and dismal, in whatever direction we turn our eyes! It is a night of anxious care and doubt for the upright disciples, who by the saying 'one among you' were struck as by a flash of lightning. A night of silent pain is it, moreover, for Jesus, who cannot possibly shake from His bosom, as an adder, the treacherous disciple, without His spirit being stirred within Him to its depths. A night of sin and misery, and of approaching despair, is it for the son of perdition, who there in the darkness, like a sleep-walker, proceeds along the streets of Jerusalem, now the tool of Satan, but soon to be his victim.

And yet, in midst of all the clouds, what brilliant *rays of light* dazzle our eyes; and the whole narrative of the betrayal, how may it be termed a continued manifesta-

tion of Jesus' glory! What infallible knowledge, which did not allow itself for a moment to be led astray through a show of friendship, but had discovered and unmasked Satan in the circle of the disciples, even when he had transformed himself into an angel of light! What deep wisdom, which directs this discovery in such a manner, that Judas shall not be withheld by force from the accomplishment of his subtle purpose, but at the same time, to the close, allowing him the opportunity of retracing his fatal error! What long-suffering patience, that suffers the wretch as long as possible in His immediate presence, warns him expressly till the end, and not till the last moment gives him up to the fate himself had chosen! But what spotless holiness at the same time, which, when all was vain, no longer holds him back, and cries to him: 'What thou doest, do quickly,' and severs the last tie between light and darkness! Yea, thus was the Lord to the end, in all things consistent with Himself. Thus is He still at all times the infallible and holy, but also the long-suffering and gracious, who knows the hearts of all, so that never through a traitor shall He and His holy cause be really injured. Thus shall He once again appear as Judge of the world even as He is now its Saviour, and—the words are His—'all nations shall know that I am He who trieth the hearts and reins.'

What an impressive *summons*, which, after the lapse of centuries, sounds aloud to us from out a night at once of such abundant shadows and sunbeams! A summons to hidden traitors such as Judas: the eyes which behold in darkness have also seen the cobweb tissue of your sinful schemes, and in no case can they be led astray by false appearances. A summons to wavering friends, like the eleven: watch and pray, and ask at every word of warning from Supreme Wisdom: 'Lord, is it I, who now should fear Thy penetrating glance?' A summons

not the last, for those who are called to suffer like Jesus; embracing not merely that which comes directly from above, but also the painful, though undeserved, suffering which men yet cause thee; though deeply feeling, bear it willingly, and though at distance infinite, wisely and worthily and triumphantly as He! Strengthen thyself, as did thy Saviour also, under that cross, with God's own word in the Scriptures; and if the night is in and round thee, let thine eye be fixed on the eternal light above! Oh, happy thought, which the believer may take with him from the upper chamber: the holy but compassionate eyes of Jesus remain as stars in all the darkness of the way, and every sop on earth, steeped in a bitter sauce, becomes as though given to us by Jesus' faithful hand. The Son of man has truly left this earth as it is written of Him, but He shall come again to fetch His people to the marriage feast, where the pathetic 'one of you shall betray me' shall not be said of any of the guests, and there shall be *no* night there.



TWENTY-FIFTH FEBRUARY.

'These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.'—
JOHN xvi. 33.

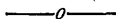
PARTING is painful, and the last words of friends about to leave us can never be forgotten. Among the most beautiful pages of Holy Scripture we undoubtedly count those that set before us the swan-like songs of Jacob, Moses, David, or in which we witness the striking scene of Paul's leave-taking of the elders of the Church at Ephesus. But what is even this beside the incomparable farewell discourse and prayer of our Lord preserved for us by John; and as often as

we read it, must we not place ourselves in sight and hearing of the last hours and moments of His life here below? What moving pathos, what tender love, what sincere fear of God, what radiant holiness, what soul-elevating and consoling hope we may find here as in a summary set down; and it cannot surprise us, that throughout all ages many a moistened eye in the greatest straits of life and death has found rest in these Gospel pages from which the divine breath of the Holy Spirit, as it were, audibly and perceptibly whispers forth: Here we see the Son of God beside the Father in His superhuman glory, but at the same time in His voluntary self-abasement and obedience. Here we meet the Master and His disciples exhibiting a wisdom without parallel, but also a fidelity without bounds. Here stands the Christ before our eyes over against the world in all the radiance of His holiness, but also in all the fervour of His glowing love. Can either be more strikingly expressed than has been done already in that majestic 'But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence'? Truly the world had known, although it then forgot and still forgets, alas, how often! but the faith, which comprehends something concerning this, will not enter from year to year the upper chamber without in spirit kneeling on the threshold, and from the depth of the heart repeating: Yea, verily, they who have seen Thee, O Lord, have seen the Father!

Well might Jesus, at the end of such a farewell discourse, bear testimony: 'These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have *peace*.' In truth peace, deep, holy peace, is the key-note which here from the beginning to the end sounds forth to us; and if with the ear of a John we lay ourselves silently down on the bosom of the Master, which in these last words

beats against ours, sometimes we may be filled with the anticipation of a peace which evidently has welled forth from a higher source than any earthly one, and has raised us above the heaviest lot that here can crush us. Why are these moments then so rare? and why are they so often followed by hours and days in which no peace assuredly, but sorrow, fills our hearts, as it did that of Christ's first friends at the hour of parting? May it not also be because we forget to lay to heart the parting words of love: 'Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me'? Alas, it is so! Our poverty in faith makes us unfit to comfort our sick souls at the rich stream of consolation which flows here: beside an inexhaustible stream, we stand as with a broken pitcher in our hands; and though with the disciples we avow, 'We believe that Thou camest forth from God,' ever afresh we must bow down our heads even to the earth at the kind but deeply shaming question, 'Believest thou me?' Already has experience, to our shame and injury, taught us, the belief of to-day is not that of the morrow, and the peace of yesterday often is snatched away from us in the strife of to-day. What counsel can we take to succour a heart so faithless in such a troubled world? For this time only this: in the last discourse and prayer of the Saviour there is preserved for His friends a heritage rich enough 'to deliver their souls from death, and to keep them alive in famine.' Let us turn back, not only now and then, but constantly, to strengthen ourselves with the rich consolation of the promises here bestowed on us, and which can never be gainsaid. Let it be to us in the darkest hour, as if the well-known voice from the upper chamber personally repeated to us, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' Let the fearful contest of the Lord reconcile us with our own; but then, moreover,

let His triumph become to us a pledge and foretaste of our own victory, obtained in fellowship with Him. Let us live, love, pray, strive, die on words like these, which do nothing less than make us taste 'the powers of the world to come;' and when to us also the hour approaches, when the sad farewell must be taken, it shall anew be seen that that word spoken at the Passover feast has not yet lost its power: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.'



TWENTY-SIXTH FEBRUARY.

'And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.'—MATT. xxvi. 30.

HAD the anthem of praise, the great hallelujah (Ps. cxiii.—cxviii.), which arose at every Passover table in Israel, ever been sung under more extraordinary circumstances, and with feelings more unutterable than those of our Lord on the night of His betrayal? It is a singular incident in the life of the God-fearing Jehoshaphat, that he (2 Chron. xx. 21), before the commencement of a decisive engagement, placed a band of singers at the head of his army, that they might 'praise the beauty of holiness,' and go forth to fight as to a festival: but what was this contest compared with that which awaited the Saviour? Yet He too goes forth to meet the insolent foe with the hymn of praise upon His lips; and when the hymn was ended, He calmly steps across the threshold which divides the hall from the street, security from danger, life from death. The eye of our imagination sees Him appear beneath the starry heaven, accompanied for the last time by faithful friends alone. May it not, above this page of the story of the Passion, be placed as title, the Good

Shepherd surrounded by His sheep, docile, but apt to stray? Yea, verily, here His image shows itself before us as suddenly invested with beauteous splendour; His voice sounds forth to us as comforting even whilst warning us. How sharpsighted is that *Shepherd's eye* which discovers the near approaching danger for every one of His disciples, above all for Peter, and above that reckless head sees Satan menacingly hover! How calmly beats that *Shepherd's heart*, from which a psalm of praise issues; doubly significant and beautiful, when we peruse it with an eye on Jesus! It was amazing when subsequently Paul and Silas, in the jail at Philippi, sang praises in the night; but they, too, also knew already Him who had said, 'I have overcome the world.' Jesus had to tread the winepress alone: He knows that which none of His followers understood: 'The prince of this world cometh.' Yet was the song in the night still not forgotten; yea, when all press round Him, thinking only of themselves, nothing weighs so heavy on His heart as the distress and danger that menace His disciples. Does He, with faithful *Shepherd's care*, and just in good time, trace already at short distance the prowling wolf? He takes upon His lips the words of prophecy (Zech. xiii. 7), which speaks of the dispersing of the sheep when the threatening sword awakes against the Shepherd. But He alludes also to their reunion in Galilee after He shall have arisen. No contradiction embitters Him, no false security misleads Him: with infallible certainty He foresees and foretells what shall take place on that same night; and after the last warning has been rejected, the last rash oath of recklessness answered by an eloquent silence, He goes forth to the one great *Shepherd's deed*, which yet remains to be accomplished, but for which He also shows Himself prepared, to lay down His life for the sheep. Soon the peaceful upper chamber lies behind Him: yonder

already opens dark Gethsemane, where His soul shall be pressed with anguish even unto death; but Jesus hesitates not a moment, for this command had He received from the Father; and in death as in life He shall show Himself the Good Shepherd, and only rise a second time to go before His flock.

Alas! why is the voice of this Good Shepherd so frequently opposed? and why is there yet always so large a number who think, like Peter, that they know better than Jesus? How many are there who, not less than he, are wanting in upright faith and fervent love, and who, notwithstanding, suffer fearful shipwreck on the rock of spiritual pride and self-confidence unbounded! Thrice blessed the faithful love of Christ our Saviour, who constantly unveils Himself to us, and, as with outstretched finger, points us to the abyss into which we are in danger of rushing whenever we trust more in our own hearts than on His unerring word. Are we reckless?—He casts us down from our imagined heights; but when Satan would sift us and fling us forth as chaff, He thrusts aside the hand of the destroyer, and grasps compassionately ours, and saves us ere we are awake. Assuredly, not our fidelity to Christ, but His own loyalty, inflexible even towards weak and faithless disciples, is the one ground of our hope. Let us trust henceforward upon nothing, save His love alone; and let us follow Him not with a rash vow, but with a silent prayer in the soul,—then, also, we like Him shall go forth through the twilight to the night encounter with a song of praise upon our lips.

TWENTY-SEVENTH FEBRUARY.

'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here and watch with me.'—MATT. xxvi. 38.

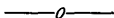
'Gethsemané! O that I might
Enter thy walls at dead of night
And view my Lord; and, for the sight,
Moon, lend thy rays, pale, but yet bright!'

SO sang a pious poet of the last century, and still from year to year the same sentiment wells forth from every Christian heart. Who can imagine a Passion Week discourse without a pilgrimage to Gethsemane; but who enters save with still emotion the sombre garden on Mount Olivet? Ah, what a striking contrast between the hymn of praise sung in the upper chamber at the Passover, and the plaintive tone heard on yonder side of the brook Cedron! We almost feel disposed to turn aside our faces from the fearful scene: 'But sit ye here,' exclaims the Lord to His disciples, as before their eyes He enters Gethsemane. There He permits us also, as once the three trusted disciples, to follow Him deeper into the shadow; and it is given us with wide-opened eyes to see, with holy disposition of heart to feel: who shall let fall the plummet in the ocean of this unfathomable distress of soul! For this we must perceive immediately, here, as elsewhere, the bodily suffering was still the least part; the bloody sweat and tears, however touching, are yet nothing compared with the inward pressure and nearness to death of a soul which is here, as through a hand unseen, cast down; and we can scarcely forgive the disciples—above all Peter—that in this fearful night they could not watch with the Lord one hour. Ah, what is human faith, which even beside such suffering cannot tender so small

a service! What is the deepest grief we know, compared to those that agonized this Man of sorrows, who, as Luther has said so well, of the terror of death felt at least ten degrees where we scarcely can feel two! How awful must that suffering have been, of which the prospect only made the God-man's heart beat with such vehemence! and how fearful must sin be in the eyes of God, when He must come to such extremities with the Son of His good pleasure, ere for a ruined world the light of redemption can dawn! Here is, indeed, the place, if nowhere else, to cry aloud this prophecy: 'Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid!' Well may our soul also be dismayed, utterly dismayed at it,—first and most deeply, because our sin has aggravated this sorrow, and because that we so often, so long, and so indifferently, can pass it by as though in nowise implicated!

And yet even here, for the believer, may not sadness become joy, and the soul-suffering of Gethsemane the source of humble, godly gladness? Oh! most assuredly; for it here again appears, whom and what we have in this mediator of the New Testament, who in the days of His flesh offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears. Or learn we not to know Him as the true partaker of our nature, made like unto the brethren in all things except sin? Is it not here anew apparent, that He is truly the willing, but, moreover, the perfect Saviour of sinners, who felt all the weight of the sacrifice which He was about to offer, but never for a moment seeks to avoid the approaching contest? Yea, after such a sight, can we in the least doubt that He of right may well be termed the merciful and faithful High Priest in heaven, who, Himself made perfect through suffering, has sympathy with our weakness? 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.' In order to feel all the comfort of this passage, one must lie bowed down

beneath a weight of spiritual woe, the burden of which none can guess ; uncomforted, left out, abandoned, . . . But nay, that shall we never be, so far as we know Him who once has crawled as a worm in the dust, but now exalted even to God's right hand, is always ready to hear this whene'er a soul comes to Him : ' Tarry here and watch for me, whilst I more closely pray.' Let no one who with both hands grasps this immeasurable comfort misjudge the awful solemnity of the scene at Gethsemane, and longer carelessly indulge in sleep ! Fearful must it be to fall into the hands of the living God, if for us this spiritual struggle has been striven in vain ; and what shall save us, if so great a love as this speaks no longer to the heart ? Forbid it, precious Saviour ; and let it be with us as though anew there echoed from the sanctuary of Thine agony this call to us : ' Ye are bought with a price ; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's !'



TWENTY-EIGHTH FEBRUARY.

' And being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly.'—LUKE xxii. 44.

LATELY we ventured a glance into Gethsemane, as the wrestling-place of the most terrible of soul conflicts ; but do we not learn to consider it in the same hour, as the scene of the most glorious victory ? Yet we know that the Lord did not alone complain, but also prayed as never man before, and in prayer He yielded His divine and human will to the will of the Father unconditionally and with submission. ' Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.' How is it possible that any one in this deprecation of the cup of suffering can see ought unworthy, and from the dust of Gethsemane

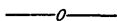
can fashion missiles to wound therewith this sacred head? Is it then virtue to want feeling, and is prayer to avert what wounds our nature sinful? Does there exist a particle of conflict between the Son of man's own *will* and what the Father had commanded; or would the God-man really have been greater in thine estimation, if He, with songs of joy upon His lips, had issued forth to meet the traitor? Have later Christian martyrs drawn their courage from a believing glance to this first Guide, who, praying, won the battle fully? and can any one of us, even in some degree, perceive what was included in a suffering like this, voluntarily to bear the penalty for all the sin of the whole world? Yea, who can doubt, if in Gethsemane He suffered the assault of the *adversary*, regarding whom He said Himself that evening: 'the prince of this world cometh,' and who had tried to smite the second Adam through terror, as he had tried to win the first through guile? But in vain; the weapon of prayer seems in these hands absolutely invincible; but truly never was it wielded in more worthy guise. Is the soul grieved?—the spirit raises itself to God; does peace still not return after the first petition?—a second, a third ascends; does the contest wax hotter?—so much more fervently He pleads: greater than Jacob at the brook of Jabbok, greater than Elijah upon Carmel is here. What marvel that these conflicts wove for Him a *crown*, the like of which has never adorned any before or after Him! On such a voice of supplication the heavens, black with thunderclouds, open, and an angel descends to quicken that fainting heart with heavenly comfort. Was this accomplished solely by the appearance, or through an actual word, of the messenger from heaven? was the Lord strengthened in spirit or only in the body, which otherwise perhaps might be overcome? Does the angel speak to Him of the Father's will, or of the joy set before Him, or—but

enough. Immediately thereafter the struggle is past ; the hero goes to meet His captors as one who had already obtained the triumph. Now no more He says to His disciples, 'Tarry here,' but, 'Rise up, let us be going.' The hour is come, but it finds Him, as it must find Him, not only strengthened, but also armed : in every respect entirely recovered from that awful moment ; but truly devoted to the suffering through which He shall be made perfect.

And how can we better express the inestimable *result* of this victory, than in the words of Scripture : 'Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered ; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him' ? (Heb. v. 8, 9.)

When a traveller in the East at the present day pauses a moment upon the supposed site of Gethsemane, under the shadow of the old olive trees, and muses on the past, he plucks a single leaf from the bough, and carries it away with him as a memorial of the scene. And we who now in spirit have not merely sat but have knelt here, and know what drinking of that cup cost to the Saviour of our souls, what fruit for eternity shall the garden on Mount Olivet bear for us ? Varied are our lots and varied our prospects, but this is certain, three cups are earlier or later offered to the lips of each one here below : the intoxicating cup of sin, the bitter cup of pain, the inevitable cup of death. Watchfulness, when the first is offered us ; submission, when the second ; faith, when the third and last : is it too much to ask these things from those who know that Christ has also suffered them ? and wherefore ? Oh, our soul, when sin entices, think on Gethsemane, and drive sleep from thine eyes ! When suffering presses, and the whole heart rises against the dark but inexorable dealings of Providence, think of Gethsemane ; and by prayer get rid of your self-will, that

God's will may be done! And, finally, when the last foe draws near, think on Gethsemane, and overcome the fear of death by glancing at the triumphant Prince of Life! And Thou, the Conqueror at Gethsemane, ah! think on us who here toil in the dark valley of Cedron, and be Thou Thyself constantly the angel who strengthens us in our great weakness!



TWENTY-NINTH FEBRUARY—LEAP YEAR.

‘Put now thy hand into thy bosom.’—Ex. iv. 6.

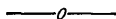
ARRIVED at an important turning-point of his life, Moses receives this enigmatical command, the object of which appears from the sequel of the history, and the tendency of which, on attentive consideration, cannot be doubtful to us. Moreover, by this sign he must be convinced of the power of his God as opposed to his own incapacity and impurity, and be placed in a condition to appear before Pharaoh as one not merely sent by Jehovah, but, moreover, through Him enlightened, purified, and strengthened for his exalted calling. Since that time, the exhortation to put the hand into one's own bosom has become a warning to closer examination of the condition of our spiritual life, and in so far no other than that which Paul, the Moses of the New Testament, addressed to the Corinthians: ‘Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves’ (2 Cor. xiii. 5). It is unnecessary to expatiate on the necessity, the difficulty, the requirements of self-examination, the importance of which will by no Christian be seriously denied. Where so many hasten forward breathlessly, from distraction to distraction; and are accustomed to live outside of themselves almost entirely, the truly wise man feels from time to time increased

necessity to descend into the little world within, and, as under the holy eye of God, to call himself to strict account for all that he finds there. We are summoned to this especially by the approach of the celebration of the Lord's Supper, by the beginning and the end of a year, by the return of our own birthday, and by so many other milestones on the highway of our life, which may be to us like the impressive 'Stop, traveller,' which stood written here and there on the military roads and in the cemeteries of the ancient Romans.

But when do we hear this call louder than on this very day of the year, which recurs but every eight and forty months, and thus even in a life of eighty years can only happen twenty times? To-day we look back at one glance over four years; and in an age in which every one feels and complains that we live faster than our forefathers, the cipher obtains increased significance. How much throughout all these last years and months, both near at hand and far away, has happened, come, and gone: how many places now stand empty which last leap year were happily and honourably filled: of how many, who on this 29th of February are yet alive, may it with all probability be expected, that when this day a second time stands in the calendar, their names will be found inscribed in the long list of deaths! Yea, verily, 'we fly hence' can to-day less easily be forgotten than on other days; but this time may it be to us as if the voice of God, not that of man, called to us: 'Put now thy hand into thy bosom'! The heart which beats within—who occupies the first place there? and the life, which has taken such a giant stride in its swift course, to what is it most specially devoted? On what path are we walking before the eye of Him who tries the heart and the reins? and if it is in the way of life, do we go forwards or backwards? There have been many, many shipwrecks to the faith of others throughout the course

of these four years: have we kept ours, and do we see to it amidst the storms and strifes of life to have our faith renewed? Is that well-known saying of the apostle true of us: 'For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed'? So much closer to the grave, how much closer are we to the Lord of heaven? Where shall we be, when the world next time shall write down this unwonted date? and if these fingers shall never write it more, shall it be to our unspeakable gain?

The answers to these questions in their full extent is known to the Searcher of hearts alone; but we must not rest until as far as necessary and possible we have ourselves come to its clear perception. What boots it to stretch forth our hands to other bosoms than our own, or to rend our garments with a show of penitence, so long as we are to the heart that beats beneath all but a stranger? It must come to personal examination; yet ere this day sink into evening, let it come; although with as mortifying a result as to God's messenger of old, still let it come. Only, along with this strict search of self let there arise this earnest prayer: 'Search me, O God, and know my heart' (Ps. cxxxix. 23); but then, moreover, too, this holy choice: 'I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments' (Ps. cxix. 60).



FIRST MARCH.

'Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?'—LUKE xxii. 48.

THERE is no more horrible page in the history of David's surroundings than the murder of Amasa, perpetrated through the treacherous kiss of the vindictive Joab, accompanied by a deadly sword-thrust (2 Sam. xx. 9, 10). And yet, what is even this atrocious crime com-

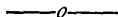
pared with Judas' deed of infamy, when he hurries impatiently before the band sent forth to take his Master, in order to give them the appointed signal? Heaven and hell, we see as it were, exchange a glance upon this ever memorable scene on which the Lord and His betrayer for the last time meet. But what a contrast, the more astounding the longer we gaze! If we direct our eye to Judas, there is united here *a blindness of mind, an insensibility, a meanness*, of which history, sacred or profane, scarce affords a parallel. The blinded man, to give a signal like this to his confederates, and for a moment imagine that he, through feigned show of friendship, can deceive the glance of Jesus! The unfeeling man, who thus repays the love shown to him even that very night, and only listens to the powers of darkness, who thrust him onward down his sloping course! The base-hearted, who thus profanes the sacred token of friendship, and as a serpent winds his crooked path within the portal of Gethsemane, to breathe his deadly venom on the fairest flower that e'er adorned the paradise of God!

Who can picture what such experience must have been to the sensitive, the holy, the all-discerning Lord; but who, moreover, can speak sufficiently the praises of His glory, shown at that same hour? In contrast to Judas' blindness of mind, He shows a *calm*, against which cowardice dashes as fruitlessly as the sea foam against the rock. 'The kisses of an enemy are deceitful,' says Solomon (Prov. xxvii. 6); but He who suffers this, confirms at the same time another of the wise man's sayings: 'He that ruleth his spirit is stronger than he that taketh a city' (Prov. xvi. 32). Great would have been His forbearance if He had received the traitor's greeting silently; but He so speaks, that literally no word is here misplaced, not one too many or too few, and in contrast to the *insensibility* of Judas, He shows a *love* unquenched by fellest hate: '*Judas, betrayest thou the Son*

of man with a kiss?' Place the stress alternately on each of these words, and thou must almost hear as though tears choked the voice; thou seemest to see the tender Shepherd stoop over the brink of the abyss, if possible to save the lost sheep yet from plunging into darker depths. But all in vain; the sunbeam melts the ice, but leaves the rock unaltered; the last word of the Saviour was at the same time prophetic of His first as Judge. In contrast to the *meanness* of Judas, here appears a *majesty*, which even, where men have sought to injure it, but shines the brighter, like the sun dimmed for a moment by a passing cloud. Sublime self-consciousness never forsakes the Saviour; with one movement He shakes from Him the serpent that had twined about His arm. Whilst Judas slinks behind, Jesus steps boldly forward, and can see the traitor in the centre of the band (John xviii. 5), and never deign to cast another glance at him.

Yea, verily, that may be termed calm majesty; that spotless holiness joined to matchless love; but let us at the same time use for emblem and token the manner in which the kiss of insincerity is still given on many sides, and returned by those who are Christ's followers in name. Or is Judas the only one of the apostles who no longer counts spiritual kindred among professing Christians; and especially in our own day, is there less harm done by so-called friends to the Lord's cause, than then was perpetrated on His sacred person? Is the garment of hypocrisy no longer worn in the assembly of the saints, and under the shadow of night the Judas kiss ne'er pressed upon the lips of innocence? Does not the poisonous seed from which this fatal fruit has ripened hide in all hearts; and should the question: 'Friend, wherefore art thou come?' be put to none who gather round the cross and table of the Lord? Once more shall He who unmasked Judas avenge His outraged majesty, even though He now is silent. But yet He ever suffers long, reproveth, draws

at the present day as He did then; and thus He only dooms that He may save. Thrust not then away, it may be at the eleventh hour, the saving hand, but rather let our hearts give heed to this loving counsel: 'Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him!' (Ps. ii. 12.)



SECOND MARCH.

'As soon then as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground.'—JOHN xviii. 6.

'WHEN I am weak, then am I strong,'—so we hear the Apostle Paul at one time declare; yet in whom is this paradox more strikingly verified than in Him who in Gethsemane had resisted unto blood, but also through the power of faith and prayer had overcome the fear of death? What a transition from the scene of the agony to that of the apprehension of Jesus, and what a contrast! In truth, Gethsemane as it here shows itself to us, may be termed at once the theatre and the school of the greatest change.

Agony of soul we here see changed into heroic courage. 'Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth.' The eye so lately dimmed with tears is calmly raised above; the form bent down with suffering has regained its elasticity; voluntarily the cup, so deprecated once, is lifted to the lips, and the question, 'Whom seek ye?' shows He will not retreat,—scarcely has He replied till we behold *overwhelming force change to defeat*. Is not the band numerous, well-armed, prepared for possible resistance? Here oppose them nought but a word, but yet that one majestic 'I am He' suffices to cast down before Him in the dust the soldiers,

and to make the cords fall from the hands ready to grasp and bind Him. Even if here we have no special miracle to consider, but rather an instance of the supreme power of the Lord's personality over the mean and cowardly foe, similar to that which had been shown before at the cleansing of the temple, still we need not one moment ask, which was the victor in this unequal strife, and which the vanquished; and when we thus depict the Blessed One as He stood there in silent majesty fronting His foes, whom He had felled to the ground but not killed or disarmed, we sink in speechless worship at His feet, and almost envy the eleven their place in His close neighbourhood.

At least, we see *danger changed into security* for those weak ones, who, if the Master had not watched, the foe would least have spared. As victor, Jesus prescribes the terms on which He will yield Himself their prisoner; not on His own release, but on the safety of His followers is His mind set; and as He, with wisdom infallible, perceives that their spiritual preservation, for which He that same night had prayed, could only have place by the maintenance of their temporal life, He does not ask submissively, but commands: 'If ye seek me, let these go their way.' What must John, who here describes the scene, have felt at witnessing it; and Judas,—who stands by, no longer 'one of the twelve,' no hair touched of his head,—what passes in his heart? We know not; but certainly as we contemplate once again this night scene full of splendour, it becomes to us ever clearer; the seeming *victory* obtained by the powers of evil *ends immediately in overthrow*. The band of soldiers, spared by His magnanimity, may bind the captive and lead Him hence,—they only help to accomplish Isaiah's prophecy: 'He is led as a lamb to the slaughter.' The eleven set free, hasten immediately in all directions, in order to relate to all who will hear it the meanness of the foe and the greatness of

the Lord. The fettered One goes hence to die, but that death shall become the life of the world; and whatever foe rises against His followers, He still stretches forth the hand of His protection above the seemingly defenceless, and repeats: 'Let these go their way.'

Companions in redemption at a price so far beyond all estimation, can we contemplate all this without the scene becoming at once to us the school of a great change, operating this time in the small world within? But what Christian feels not this: hostility must change to deep submission, divided affection into free choice, doubt into well-assured belief, fear into joyful expectation, where'er the heart through God's grace has learned ought of these things? Nothing less complete than such surrender does He deserve, who towards friend and foe has shown Himself so great and good. As freely as He gave Himself up to His captors must we devote ourselves to Him, or the garden of Gethsemane has borne for us no fruit. Therefore throughout this week He goes forth to us a second time in order to ask us whom we seek and whom we desire, and ever He repeats: 'I am He;' I who redeemed you; I who preserve you; I who died and live in order of all sickness of the soul at last to make an end. Did He not let His foes seek Him in vain, how easily will He allow Himself to be found of a heart longing for salvation; and if we are really His, what can thenceforth perturb our souls? Even when opposed by the mightiest adversary, we stand alone even less than the eleven, and the end of our history shall ever be the same as theirs: the word of Jesus shall be fulfilled, the salvation of our souls secured.

THIRD MARCH.

'Put up again thy sword into his place. Or thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?'—LUKE xxvi. 52, 53.

'YE shall see greater things than these:' thus we heard the Lord at the commencement of His public life speak to Nathanael; but was not this saying especially towards the close of His ministry most gloriously fulfilled? Recently we saw the band of men at the entrance to Gethsemane disarmed by a single word of power; now not less amazing, truly, we see the help of men and angels refused by the suffering Jesus.

Astounding refusals, whene'er we cast our eyes upon their evidence! A disciple draws his sword, and Jesus rebukes him: nay, Peter, this is no time for strife, but for suffering, and watchfulness, and prayer. Yet more: an angelic host watch for His nod, and Jesus restrains them; His eye beholds the heavenly legions ready to descend to His assistance, but His lips utter not the prayer the Father certainly would hear. Yea, stranger yet, a foe receives his just reward, and Jesus heals him: the last motion of the yet unfettered hand is devoted to heal the wound the arm of rashness gave. With one touch He restores the high priest's servant; with one word He corrects Peter: thus He cures two at once, but shows, meanwhile, that neither to aid of man nor angel will He have recourse.

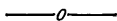
Why not? On this point He gives three utterances on this occasion, and teaches us to know the grounds of a refusal which justly astounds us. First of all, the warning to Peter: 'All who take the sword shall perish by the sword:' the spiritual warfare must be waged

with spiritual weapons. Then the question for him and all men : 'How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?'—the counsel of God shall stand, the Christ of the prophets *must* suffer, so shall He be glorified and the world shall be saved. Lastly, He speaks the language of holiest devotion to what the Son of God avows as His vocation : 'The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?' This cup so lately prayed to be removed, He sees now mingled, and by the Father put into His hand, and actually at this same moment He begins to prove the bitter draught. And now, now shall any one or any thing come between Him and His awful suffering? Nay, Peter, now at least put up thy sword into its sheath ; or wilt thou not merely strike off the adversary's ear, but strike the cup, moreover, from the Master's lips? Nay, heavenly legions, back to your posts and rest : from this moment there is nought for you to do than here to learn love and obedience. Oh, sublime, adorable refusal, in such a manner shown, on such grounds justified !

Much remains here incomprehensible ; but this we still perceive : Of such a refusal the *fruit* can be no less than that the Father's name is glorified as never yet before ; than that the Son after His spotless obedience becomes exalted to the uttermost ; than that the world is reconciled and redeemed through an atonement, in which not even the eye of holiness can discover blemish. On account of this refusal of all help of men or angels at that hour when the greatest battle upon earth was fought, Heaven now exalted the Lamb ; and even we perceive, at least in some degree, that the sacrifice of life itself would yet fall short, did we seek in gratitude to requite such love !

Where is, next to Golgotha, a spot on earth which fetters us like to Gethsemane ; but where, also, is a better school of Christian conflict and God-assimilating suffer-

ing? Conflict! Ah! where are they who even in any measure do as the Lord? and what disciple does not, like Peter, sometimes allow himself, through unholy zeal, to be deluded, and with carnal weapons to fight the battles of God's kingdom? Assuredly, did not the Lord Himself avert the consequences of our rashness, His cause would suffer greater injury from the folly of His friends than from the malice of His enemies. Let us see to it, that His name is not on our account blasphemed; and let us take especially that weapon, concerning which the Lord has never said, 'Put up again thy sword into its sheath,'—the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God! But let us then gaze upon this word as our star in every night around us, and in the dark hours let us also ask: 'The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? shall not I, for whom Jesus from the cup removed the bitterest drop; I, to whom the draught shall prove a medicine; I, who in the gall and wormwood may taste a Father's love?' Yea, drink it, brother, sister, it may be with moist eye, but never with sullen heart, and name it a cup of thanksgiving, for which thou wilt bless God!



FOURTH MARCH.

'But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.'—LUKE xxii. 53.
Compare MARK xiv. 48-52.

YET once again Gethsemane, but what a difference between the Lord's entrance into the garden and His exit from it! He entered in security, He is led forth in bonds: then accompanied by none but friends, now encompassed by His foes: then amid the stillness of nature lighted by the gentle moonshine; now, surrounded by the tempest of tumult, He is dragged thence

by the red glare of torches: then on the way to pray, now to suffer and to die: then strengthened by the coming of an angel, now the chosen prey and sport of the powers of hell. Assuredly, if ever, here it may be said with the most perfect justice: 'This is your hour, and the power of darkness;' and a keen glance is necessary in order, next to the revelation of the fearful power of sin, to see at the same time its complete powerlessness. Yet this appears so clearly in the portion of the narrative under consideration, that we hardly know which is most astounding,—the power of evil in that hour, or that which evidently surpassed and vanquished it.

It may bring forward countless forces, yet gains no triumph. 'Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves, for to take me?' says Jesus Himself, who was in nowise given to exaggerate. With 'lanterns, and torches, and weapons,' writes John. Not merely the servants, but the elders and chief priests themselves, are here; not merely individual soldiers, but a centurion and his band: it is as though no less than a campaign were necessary against one unarmed man; and yet here is no military glory gained. The band survives only because Jesus permits them to arise unhindered: in their hands He would not now be, had He not freely given Himself up: the achievement is already marked with shame ere it is ended: no laurels, truly, has malice gathered beneath these olive trees.

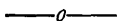
They may drive away the friends of Jesus, but cannot daunt the Master. Yea, indeed, the eleven haste breathlessly away, when what was inconceivable to them has at last become the terrible truth manifested before their eyes; they break their word; they aggravate the suffering of Him who thus has become 'a terror to His friends.' But however distressed in soul, He is not daunted for one moment: had He not that same evening predicted what this night should bring to pass? and

the enmity which effects it, what does it other than impose on His prophetic words the stamp of truthfulness?

Yet further, *they may assail an unarmed man, but cannot cover their own shame.* Slight traces often lead to great discoveries; thus, more readily than through a long recital, the malignity of the band is brought before us by the brief notice of Mark (chap. xiv. 50, 51) regarding that incautious young man, who, perhaps disturbed in his sleep by the noise, rushed forth lightly clad, and escaped but narrowly falling into the hands of the wanton crew. The heroes who had seized a defenceless man, the brave soldiers who overcame one just roused from sleep, and not even dressed,—does none of them perceive how he betrays his cowardice and shame? No, the power of darkness has blinded all eyes, and thus, in fine, *they fully reach their aim, yet cannot bring to nought God's counsel.* They lead their prey away in triumph; but Jesus Himself, before His going forth to Gethsemane, had declared it: 'All this was done, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.'

Is it not fitted to call us to solemn meditation, when we thus see in the same hour the power and the impotence of sin unmasked and revealed? What a ray of light it casts over the adorable providence of God, when we so frequently see vice seemingly triumphant, and the cause of truth trampled under foot! What a presage of the hour when the kingdom of darkness shall be vanquished and disarmed, just when it weened it should dethrone God's Son! But, moreover, what a call to each of us to take an active part in the great struggle between light and darkness! Yea, fight, so cries a voice not human but divine, at the entrance of Gethsemane,—fight, but not beneath the banner of the foe! Fight the good fight, but with more faith and courage than did here the unloyal friends of Jesus! Fight with

like calm and vigour as the Lord, whom thou seest here bound and led away, but in no manner vanquished ! Follow Him, well armed, deliberate, stedfast ! And then, what danger, even should the last foe grasp thee with unrelenting hand ? Like the young man the soldiers sought to seize, let him retain only thy cast-off garment, whilst thou thyself shalt hasten on unhindered through the night to meet eternal day.



FIFTH MARCH.

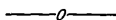
‘ Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil ; but if well, why smitest thou me ? ’—JOHN xviii. 23.

FROM Gethsemane, Jesus was brought for a moment to Annas ; from Annas, to the tribunal of Caiaphas,—of that Caiaphas who, at an earlier period, ‘gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.’ Here before the so-called spiritual court we now find our Lord wholly and entirely alone amidst irreconcilable adversaries. The disciples have fled ; Peter lingers at a short distance from the fatal threshold of this dwelling, or even crosses it ; but we know already with what sad result. The Holy One is now in the fullest sense delivered into the hands of sinners, who first dragged Him forth as a criminal ; presently, at the first hearing of His cause, place Him in a worse position than ordinary criminals ; finally, permit a criminal unchecked to mock Him. A criminal ! so may we well name the base-hearted servant of the high priest, who, on the noble answer of the Lord to the question regarding His disciples and His doctrine, pressed unsummoned between the judge and the accused with the insulting demand : ‘ Answerest Thou the high priest so ? ’ accompanied—we shudder as we read it—

with a disgraceful blow on the face. The unhappy wretch who sees not that he thus but lowers himself and also his master, whose perplexity his misdeed was designed to cover ; the criminal, who is thus the first to bestow on suffering innocence that bodily ill-treatment, whose weight and degree shall speedily increase ! Who could have marvelled if the Lord had shown resentment by indignant speech ; by exhibition of almighty power, withering the upraised arm ? Nothing is perhaps so irritating, even to the gentlest, as pain ; and certainly nothing which will cause the calmest bosom to swell like the surging sea so readily as causeless cruelty. Imagine to yourselves, ye highly born, and high in station, nay, or even the humblest among us, that ye were accused of crime though innocent, and were calmly pleading your cause, when suddenly a strange form pressed unsummoned to your side, a strange hand smote your lips against your teeth . . . ; but the mere thought of it would make us beside ourselves. Who of us would dare to condemn Paul, when the as yet unexecuted order to smite him on the mouth chafed him into indignant passion against the high priest ? (Acts xxiii. 3.) In truth, the feeling of Paul is human ; but how then name ye the reply of Jesus, when, in the full consciousness of His dignity, He feels Himself so shamefully aggrieved ? ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil ; but if well, why smitest thou me ?’ As beaten iron will send forth a spark of fire, so this blow draws from the greatness of the Lord a gleam of light ; on such comment, even this miscreant dare not repeat his crime.

Yet what a saying also, especially when we consider it not in itself, but as the fitting continuation of His reply to Caiaphas, which had been so scandalously interrupted ! As though He had said : ‘I appeal to all who heard me, but to strike is not to confute. If I have, when teaching in the synagogue or in the temple, spoken evil, bring

forward evidence of this; if what I freely manifested in the world was good, why wrongfully ill-use me?' How excellently does the Lord here exemplify the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, 'If any man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also;' but how triumphantly, moreover, is the eulogy of His apostle thereby justified: 'Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not'! Ah! why are we who call ourselves His disciples so little like Him; and when shall we understand that we are not genuine Christians, so long as the crown of meekness is wanting to our sullied brow? We always wish to gain it through the maintenance of our real or imagined rights; Jesus overcame through suffering wrong, but never doing wrong. Alas, if we could truly learn with eyes unturned away to gaze on Him, and in patience to possess our souls, not merely in regard to the cross which God Himself directly lays on us, but also on that which comes to us through men! Did He bear so much from a low menial, why should we so resent it when our fellow-servants or even our enemies make us suffer wrong? Wrong! there was only One who had a right to speak of it unconditionally, and that One bore it for us. Humbled and glorified Redeemer, engrave Thyself, Thy holy image, in our heart, bridle our tongue, break within us the power of so much selfishness and pride; and, kind Master, when on high Thou speakest of Thy disciples, name also our names before the Father!



SIXTH MARCH.

'But Jesus held His peace.'—MATT. xxvi. 63.

'SPEECH is silver, silence is gold,' so says a well-known proverb; but where is its truth more strikingly exhibited than in the history of the Passion?

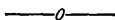
Even the pure silver discourse of the Lord to the hypocritical high priest and his unworthy dependant, was outshone by the golden splendour of His silence towards the false witnesses. Caiaphas may listen to the accusation with seeming scorn, and descending from His judgment-seat with solemn visage, ask Him: 'Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these testify against thee?' In vain, the snare is broken ere it is well laid, for 'Jesus held His peace;' and in this ineffable silence the majesty of His self-possession shines in a light which at that moment was insupportable to His enemies, but which throughout all ages has called forth the adoration of His friends.

Observe: even towards the audacious servant He was not silent,—there was still something to be done by speech; but as regarded the false witnesses, as regarded the whole assembly, who not merely had shaken off respect for justice, but also for themselves, since they allowed such scandals to have place, the Lord wrapt Himself as in a mantle of immoveable silence, and thus mutely this captive at once becomes the central figure in the judgment-hall, and draws all eyes. Yet may we not inquire why Jesus held His peace after an accusation, which He could so easily have crushed with but one single word from out His lips! Could,—most certainly should we enumerate all that He might have here explained, measured merely by human ideas. Of these there would have been no end; yet even from Jesus' lips could there have been an answer, which in power and eloquence surpassed this expressive silence? It seemed to say to Caiaphas: 'I see through your snares;' and to the council: 'That which is holy, I will not give to dogs;' and to the Father: 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God!' Even we who are evil sometimes hear unfriendly voices, which make us feel instinctively: Here every answer is beneath me. How much more powerfully must this conscious-

ness have spoken in Him, who had a finer sense of right and wrong, of honour and of shame, than any of the sinful children of men! '*But Jesus held His peace.*' Is it not the case, that when one but stretches out his finger towards the crown of thy head, thou gazest on him with a look as if thou wouldst annihilate him; if thou art silent, it is often from impotent rage alone; and if the stream of thine indignation once find vent . . . Enough: bow silently thy head before the Prince of silence, who held His peace when He might not merely have spoken, but likewise have reprovèd; and yet He uttered not a word.

'Aaron, too, held his peace' (Lev. x. 3), yet the high priest of the Old Testament was only silent under the righteous punishment of God; He of the New, upon account of the demerits and sins of men. He was silent as no one ever was before or after Him: silent not to men only, but also to God; as the unblemished and blameless Lamb is dumb before her shearers (Isa. liii. 7). As we see Him stand there so calm and silent, we receive an impression similar to that which we feel when in the evening we stand beside a restless multitude, and look up to the starry heavens through which the moon sails on in still majesty, whilst faint clouds cross her face. Here is a moment yet more sublime than when He in yonder temple, erewhile pressed on all sides to speak, repeatedly stooped down, and with His finger wrote upon the ground, deigning no other answer to His questioners. How infinitely high this Jesus stands above the crowd, both of His judges and accusers! How much these fast-closed lips say, which they will not hear, and yet cannot deny! And when now, in the stillness undisturbed, scarcely the rustling of the high priest's dress is heard, Christian, is it not with thee as though a spirit-voice spake to thee, Kneel, kneel before Him who in His speech, but also in His silence, is the worthy object

of the homage and adoration of all men and angels? Well for us if we hear not the summons, without especially seeking forgiveness for our sad want of likeness to the spotless pattern; but then, moreover, we must arise in faith of grace to be received, and at a distance trace His footsteps! To hold our peace with dignity before our fellow-men, with humility before our God, this is the greatest gift, but it is also the highest power.



SEVENTH MARCH.

'What think ye? And they answered and said, He is guilty of death.'—
MATT. xxvi. 66.

PATHETIC moment of this most dreadful night, wherein such a sentence through such lips was passed on such a head! Recently a solemn pledge had taken place, and the Lord had avowed His Messiahship with a force and energy which made Him worthy of the title of the Faithful and True Witness throughout all ages. And now, what is the answer which the maintainer of justice, the ministers of God's worship, the guardians of the sanctuary, have given? Thus it resounds in clamorous unanimity; and altogether, it appears the judges have not merely forged fetters for the captive, but branding-irons for their own consciences. What an hour of darkness! Assuredly, many wicked deeds are done on earth, but what sin becomes not small compared with this unparalleled atrocity? Here are united blindness of mind and hardness of heart which make us shudder inwardly; and if Satan had not already existed, we might have imagined him to have sprung from such artificers. In whom appears the power of sin yet stronger than in the man who has been called, and

not unjustly, the first Jesuit; because, according to his own avowal, no means appeared to him too bad if he could thereby reach his object? At this moment the sun beams in his face; but having eyes, he sees not, and ears, he hears nothing but the voice of his hatred.

Guilty of death; what a word *for the Lord!* Not that this issue for one moment could have daunted Him. He penetrated the heart of His adversaries, and knew what He might expect from such judges. He could not Himself have wished to buy a second life at the cost of truth and justice; but yet, a death sentence, and that after such a declaration! This, this is the reward of all His work of love; the doom of a blasphemer on Him whom even the Father glorified above all others, and bore witness to His truth. Thus immediately He shall experience yet more cowardly ill-treatment at His foes' hands, yet this shall specially strike and wound His body; here His heart receives a sword-thrust, of which the keenness cannot by human language be expressed.

Guilty of death; what a decision *for Israel!* Or can we forget that the elders of the Jews did nothing less, through this murder of the innocent, than pass judgment on temple and city, on land and people, which it was their part to have defended against the sword of the Romans? The Messiah had been already treated by His people with scorn and enmity, but hitherto no judicial sentence had gone forth. For the first time on this fearful night, the high priest and the King of Israel, each arrayed in his full dignity, stood forth in presence of each other. The successor of Aaron asks the Son of David for the credentials of His heavenly mission; he receives them, and reads; nay, he reads them not, but tears and treads them under foot. It was fixed, for ever fixed; the elders of the people rejected with ripe counsel the Son, on whom prophets and kings had hoped. But now lost, lost, lost! lost becomes the priestly diadem;

the lips that uttered that death sentence summon the Romans within Jerusalem.

And yet if, according to the words of Paul, the fall of Israel becomes our uprising, what light arises in this darkness, and what a moment *for the world*, when the doom, 'guilty of death,' resounds aloud ! It divides, as it were, their history into two unequal portions ; up to the time then present, the law, which kills ; from thenceforth, the gospel of reconciliation, which makes alive ; since Jesus' condemnation is the salvation of a guilty and ruined world. 'Guilty of death' the Sanhedrim pronounces ; yea, 'guilty of death,' re-echoes the Judge of heaven and earth ; guilty, not for His own sin (that be far from Him eternally !), but in that He represents a guilty race before the holy God ; and whilst He brings the offering of a perfect obedience, He likewise, as Justifier, atones for transgression. Israel's bloodguiltiness our escape ; Israel's condemnation our acquittal ; the bloody tribunal of Caiaphas the scene where reconciliation of the world with God was silently achieved ! 'For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin ; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.'

What incentive then, in conclusion, to grateful adoration of the Father, who spared not His Only-begotten from this sentence ; of thankful devotion to the Son, who, though innocent, allowed Himself to be adjudged to die, in order that at God's tribunal we should go free ! But what an impulse also to Christian watchfulness and effort against sin, which we here saw tower to such a pinnacle ! He who now rejects Christ, and who refuses to acknowledge Him for that which by His death He has declared Himself, deserves no lighter doom than Caiaphas, and offends against the life of his own soul. Lord, be merciful to us, that this come not to pass !

EIGHTH MARCH.

‘Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man.’—
MATT. xxvi. 74.

AND this is written of Simon Peter, the rock on which the Lord should build His Church! What shall we say of these narratives? The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? Never can we read without deep emotion the thrice-repeated denial, which in the main is recorded by all the evangelists in perfect harmony, and with an honest frankness which bears the most favourable testimony to their love of truth. But whenever we attempt, as far as possible, to express an impartial judgment on this deeply erring man, it is then indeed remarkable how the criticism by degrees is modified, as we gaze deeper into the heart of the culprit.

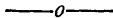
If we place this action of Peter’s first in the light of his calling, *his guilt is beyond all doubt very great*. He has been called to bear witness concerning the Lord, attached by sacred bonds to the Master, confirmed and ratified by his own promises and oaths only a few hours previous. Where are now the fair memories, the brave resolves, the holy purposes? Obliterated as the track of his boat’s keel on the Lake of Tiberias, scarcely can we recognise the apostle in the apostate, who, disturbed by the question of a maid-servant, from anger falls into worse sin, who sullies the cause of Christ, and unspeakably increases His sufferings; since what to Him is all the fury of enmity compared to this infidelity of friendship, and that, too, in the hour of trouble!

And yet, if we place this action of Peter’s in the light of his character, *his conduct becomes fully explained*. Peter’s heart and character, what is it other than a

restless and inconstant sea, which by the varying sport of tempests changes continually its form? He is the man of susceptibility, with all its virtues and defects; the sanguine temperament, which as yet had only shown example of its dangerous side. To all good he is honestly inclined, but against nothing evil is he perfectly armed; fully prepared to die for Jesus, yet in nowise ready to suffer for Him, to strive, to stand against a foe like this. Just because this character is so irritable, it feels easily the glow of shame, of false shame in all its power; and false shame, have sin and the world an ally so imperious as this? Simon, Simon, we can understand how Satan much desired to have thee, that he might sift thee as wheat, having with it mingled so much chaff; how much better did thy Lord know thee than thou knewest thyself!

Yea, we may go still further; if we place this action of Peter's in the light of circumstances, *his fault becomes not a little lessened*. Or may we, without seeking to excuse him, refer in passing to the awful power of darkness, which not only ruled in the hearts of the enemies of Jesus, but had also broken loose against Himself and His friends? Besides, the thoughtless, the unguarded, the restless are whirled along by the course of events. Peter would sooner have believed that the temple should be overthrown, than that the Lord of the temple should fall; and, lo, He stands there doomed to death! And now is it as if literally all circumstances had conspired to Simon's overthrow,—the open door, the kinsman of Malchus, the Galilean dialect, the domineering tone amidst the train of servants,—why go further? Who of us durst maintain that his gold would have stood such fire proof to the end? Who? Alas! scarcely do we view this action of Peter's in the light of our own conscience *till the accusation dies upon our lips*. Or is it not so? Scarcely do we descend deeper into ourselves,

until we feel, that not before Jesus only, but even before this Peter, we must cast down our eyes ashamed, for truly we have sinned more than he. Peter denied Jesus thrice; we, how many hundred times! Peter forsook His Master in His humbled condition, we have forsaken the glorified Lord; Peter at least to save his life, we for a post, a smile, a tinsel crown, or a—nothing. Nay, fallen apostle, here are they not who dare pass judgment upon thee; seek thy judges in a community more blameless than ours, or let the holy angels summon thee before the bar of their tribunal. But already the Lord of angels has forgiven thee; and we, who as it were marked anew thy fall—ah, that we only better kept in mind thine admonition, stamped so touchingly by thine example! ‘Be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.’ And again: ‘Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.’ And again: ‘Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.’



NINTH MARCH.

‘And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.’—LUKE xxii. 61.

ONE moment had the rock of the Church tottered on its foundation; what withheld it from being precipitated to the depths of the ocean? We have long known it, but what eye becomes satiated with seeing, what ear with hearing, what heart with thanking and adoring! Scarcely is the word of denial the third time uttered, or the second crowing of the cock heard, than like one walking in sleep, whose name is pronounced aloud, Peter awakes, but on the brink of an abyss. And

now at the same moment the sentenced Saviour is led out from the inner hall, followed by a train of servants, bound, silent, nay, but speaking as He only can. Even we, who are evil, know and speak no language by which more can be expressed than that which is conveyed by a glance of the eye. In the mother's eye, resting upon her nursling, what a world of tenderness beams forth! from the fiery glance of the leader in battle, thousands draw courage and energy; the tyrant's gaze on his prey, the libertine's upon his victim, each causes the heart to shrink with horror, although the tongue utters no syllable. Hatred and love, virtue and vice, are mirrored in the eye, and countless multitudes have, through this mysterious language, sounded each other's thoughts, and guessed their wishes. And when, then, even with us this bright sun can cast its radiant beams with such effect, what must have been a look from Jesus, from the holy Jesus, under such circumstances, and directed towards the unfaithful Peter? and who can then describe what meaning *He* shot in that one glance, or what His disciple read in it? Surely the language of memory: Peter, hearest thou that cock crow, and believest thou now that which this night I said to thee? But at the same time the tone is of reproach: Simon Barjona, is this thy kindness to thy Friend; deniest thou the Son of man with a curse? Assuredly also the language of correction: liar, false swearer! But yet again the language of consolation: 'I have prayed for thee;' and besides all this, the authoritative glance: remain not here a moment. All this Peter felt through that mysterious power whereby souls understand each other; his heart begins to burn as if fire were laid on it, and—we know where that look thereafter leads him. It is remarkable that here, and in the prediction of the same apostle's unfaithfulness (ver. 31), are the only instances throughout the history of the Passion in which Luke calls Jesus *the Lord*; must it not be in order to

express the quiet dignity, the royalty of His look and of His heart? Nay, a glance from these eyes Peter can least of all resist; it is as though the rock, touched by a rod of miracle, poured forth abundantly a stream of precious water. These tears, shed by Peter, tend to Jesus' honour, not less than the silver pieces cast away by Judas; for He has drawn them forth, He has deserved them, He has immediately in solitude dried them up, and changed them into tears of joy. Oh, well must 'the Lord' have known His servant Peter, and loved him with love ineffable, when He can thus cast him down into the dust with but one look, as afterwards He raised him with a single question! Faithful Saviour, who thus even on the way to die still showed Thyself the shepherd and guardian of the soul! Happy Peter, who, when a hell woke in thy heart, saw in that look far off a door opening in heaven!

But have we, on consideration, cause to be jealous for one moment of this disciple, since likewise on us the Master looks with kind compassion; and does not the experience of Peter permit us rather a glimpse into the heart of love undying, which, though exalted on the throne of the universe, still throbs for the sinner's safety? Yea, to us too it may be, when we so frequently dishonour and betray Him, as though the eye of Jesus out of heaven were turned upon us, full of righteous rebuke, but also full of tenderness and pity. Alas! if we less frequently sought to escape this glance; if we turned not in levity our eyes away, but let it lead us to godly sorrow, which works in us repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of! But may we then, moreover, pardoned through Jesus, and raised from the dust of penitence, like Peter be enabled to arise and go forth to strengthen our brethren, with somewhat of that love in the heart and in the eye which we have read in His. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted!

TENTH MARCH.

‘And the whole multitude of them arose and led Him unto Pilate.’—
LUKE xxiii. 1. Compare JOHN xviii. 28–32.

CONTRASTED with a great many very remarkable incidents of the Passion, there are some others which appear less abundant in interest and importance. To this class belongs assuredly, in the estimation of some persons, the simple gospel narrative, which relates to us the transference of the Lord from the ecclesiastical to the civil tribunal, from Caiaphas to Pilate. It seems not much more than merely a link uniting two portions of the account of Christ’s sufferings; and yet, on closer consideration, what a decisive turning-point in the destiny not only of Israel, but also of the Saviour, nay, of the whole sinful world! Here, too, when we consider the matter in question by the light of history and with the eye of faith, *the power of sin* manifests itself in a manner truly affecting. If we compare all the particulars which are communicated to us by the evangelists, we discover a combination of knowledge and blindness, of punctiliousness and want of conscientiousness, of pride and meanness, which fills us at once with horror and compassion. The whole assembly of the Sanhedrim, when complete, consisted of seventy members; the most acute perception, the strongest intellect, the shrewdest search of the word of prophecy, all smitten with the same blindness in regard to the highest truth: the feet swift to shed blood, but hovering at the same time on the threshold of impure paganism, arrogant in demand, yet mean and cringing too. Verily it is now ‘early morning,’ the night of unrighteousness is far spent, and the day is at hand.

Yet there shines forth, in contrast to this power, *the all-*

prevailing power of grace, displayed even here in slight traits, whenever we cast our eyes upon the suffering Lord. Recently He spake when He might have been silent, and repeated in the morning assembly (Luke xxii. 66-71) the solemn assertion of His Messiahship, which the night previous He had in vain declared before a portion of the council. But now He holds His peace when He might speak, and silently allows Himself to be cast out, led away, delivered over from one unclean hand to another, and completes in silence the new act of love, as if it were an inevitable destiny. Nay, He spares even where He might punish; and though falsehood and calumny are again the first to meet Him at the bar of civil judgment (Luke xxiii. 2), He endures the contradiction of sinners, without controlling this tempest by His decisive word of power.

And in what a striking light is manifested here, especially, the *supremacy of God's providence*, which evidently works, even where it seems inactive! Human self-will is here in its unconsciousness busily fulfilling the words of Jesus in regard to the time and manner of His death: delivered over to the Gentiles, He shall suffer the pagan death of the cross, and Pilate has no reason whatever to repeat that 'not on the feast-day' of the chief priests. But thus at the same time, as in holy silence, the redemption of the Gentile world was hastened on, and by the hands of Israel itself the kingdom of God was brought into the world, for the fulness of the times is come. 'It was early in the morning,' writes John (chap. xviii. 28); but lo, whilst yonder the sun rises behind Mount Zion, along with the first beam of light, darkness descends upon the land. There a Jewish embassy seeks admittance at the portal of a Gentile edifice; nay, there appears the Saviour of the world upon the threshold of paganism, which with His blood He will redeem. Never, so far as we know, had the

Lord yet been within a Gentile habitation ; this first entrance is of good omen, and decisive of an invisible advent. With the one step He casts down the middle wall of partition, the growth of centuries, and comes to invite the Gentiles to a fairer feast of ransom than the Passover of the Israelites can be called. He comes, after His rejection by the Jews, to suffer now the ill-treatment of the Gentiles, in order to make atonement for both in one body in the blood of His cross. And behold now, how since this moment in the spiritual world the face of all things alters ! Assuredly at a later period that night was important for Europe, in which Paul saw in a vision a man of Macedonia, who said to him, 'Come over and help us ;' but how much more significant, for the whole Gentile world, this morning, when Pilate for the first time saw this supposed 'evil-doer' stand before him. Oh, ye Christians of the Gentiles, have ye not to thank this hour that also to you the glad tidings were brought, and the light out of the East has risen in the cloudy West ? Take warning by Israel, and refuse Him not the tribute of your homage, who also for you has paid the price of His blood ! Young men, with you it is yet early morning, but not too early to dedicate your powers to Him. Impure sinners, He yet addresses you, as at the threshold of Pilate's dwelling ; delay not to fetch Him in, He brings you only grace. Christians, work with prayer and in God's power, that He may receive the reward of His sufferings also from the Gentile world ; and count on this, that all His promises shall be as certainly fulfilled as was His word 'signifying what death He should die.'

ELEVENTH MARCH.

'Then Judas, which had betrayed Him, when he saw that He was condemned, repented.'—MATT. xxvii. 3.

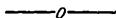
AH! why first, *then*? why not, like Peter, immediately after the sin had been committed, and his eye had met the last look of his offended but still compassionate Master? With mingled disgust and pity we turn our eyes once more upon the wicked but miserable Judas; and, as when recently we lingered over the image of the penitent Peter, the words of the apostle recur to our mind: 'Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.' Yea, sorrow of the world, that is, such as the worldly-minded man, hostile to God, may feel and show; sorrow over the consequences of sin, much more than over its commission,—this is what we perceive in Judas; consciousness of guilt, but without true humility; confession of guilt, but without true faith; atonement for guilt, even as far as possible, but without real affection; yet in this, behold the reason why such repentance cannot lead to life, but infallibly conducts to death alone. Now, when Jesus is condemned, now and not earlier, we see Judas *arraigned before the tribunal of conscience*. Has he learnt the incident in the council of Caiaphas, seen his Master led forth to Pilate, watched the bearing of the Condemned? Now at last his heart begins to speak, to rage, to burn; he names himself by a name which but an hour before he would have borne from none; he feels at once the power of conscience, and his own inability to give it rest. Oh, certainly, the word of prophecy is true: 'There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked!'

Ah! had this feeling only driven Judas to the throne of

grace ; but he knows no better refuge than those men in whose service he had voluntarily placed himself, and is next *discarded by the tribunal of the world*. What is it to these guardians of the sanctuary, if in their sight a fellow-being staggers on the brink of the abyss, if there a sinner avows his guilt to them, if an innocent man has for their money been delivered to a shameful death ? The end has been attained, and the instrument employed has served its turn ; treachery may sometimes prove extremely useful, but who deals further with the traitor ? Chill as the silver is their heart ; cruel their reply, ‘ See thou to it,’ to the poor wretch who comes in evil hour to trouble them. Thus is the world, a reed piercing the hand of such as lean on it. Well might David pray : ‘ Let me not fall into the hands of man !’ Alas, disowned by them, and robbed of better comfort, Judas *was condemned before the tribunal of God*. *The cry of Cain* : ‘ My guilt is too great to be forgiven,’ re-echoes in his inmost soul, and only a laugh from Satan answers now : ‘ Too late.’ He casts down the pieces of silver in the open door of the temple, and hastens out, but without being able to find rest in solitude. It becomes night in his soul, night in the future, night throughout eternity. He goes thence, and—we part from him ; God grant that we may never see him more ! When shortly afterwards a human foot traverses this region of terror, the way-farer starts back horrified at sight of the body of Judas ; but the spirit . . . We will not lift the veil, on which the hand of Jesus has written : ‘ It had been good for that man if he had not been born.’

Oh, certainly, there is retribution in eternity, but there is, moreover, a reflection of God’s judgment even in this present world. *Branded before the tribunal of the future*, Judas sinks from our vision ; branded with disgrace by the same hands which had told out to him the reward of shame, and for which the field was now bought to

bury strangers in. Thus often an alien coming to bear his kinsman to the grave, and hearing the enigmatical name Akeldama, would inquire its meaning and origin; and it could not be otherwise than that, along with the crime of the high priests and the innocence of the Lord, the shame of Judas should be immortalized, and that the curse should cling to the traitor even in his grave. Yea, verily, sin thoroughly completes its contract, death, and sinners shall be destroyed from the earth. What becomes of the man who turns away from God and Christ? and what shall become of us if we break off from Him whom Judas betrayed and forsook? Let, then, the example of the unfaithful disciple, who yet, when in the agony of death, bore witness to this 'innocent blood,' be profitless to none. 'Come unto Him, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth!'



TWELFTH MARCH.

'Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.'—JOHN xviii. 37.

I GIVE thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things,'—thus Paul addresses Timothy,—'and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession' (1 Tim. vi. 13). Evidently he has present to his mind the remarkable dialogue between the Lord and the Roman governor, of which the words of our text form part. And, indeed, the moment to which the passage transports us may well be termed memorable, and the confession regarding His person, His kingdom, and His subjects, elicited by Pilate a good, or as it stands literally, a *beautiful* confession.

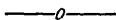
Beautiful and good on account of the *exalted character* to which this confession so indubitably testifies. The Lord might have refrained from answering the question of Pilate, which, suggested by the most groundless accusation, showed far more surprise and curiosity than unfeigned love of truth. But no, He does not hesitate a moment to assert that which may make Him ridiculous or despicable in the eyes of the judge. Arrayed in clanking fetters, He expresses the most exalted self-consciousness in a manner which at once makes evident the folly of the accusation, but at the same time must force its way to the understanding and conscience of the pagan governor. How is it possible that men can thus weaken and wrest His assertion, that He is a king, so as to understand it in a metaphorical sense alone, almost in the same manner as every great teacher may be termed a king! No; rather does the Lord seek to enforce His royal title as earnestly as possible; and when He declares that He has come 'to bear witness of the truth,' that does not mean that truth is His sole *dominion*, not that it is the great *power* alone by which He reigns over the mind and spirit of His subjects. All here is royal—the tone, the spirit, the whole tendency of this His incomparable discourse; and there lies a deep meaning in the old fable, that on His entrance into the judgment-hall the Roman ensigns reverentially bowed, as touched by an unseen hand: the true, the only King upon this scene is He, whose innocence a moment later was acknowledged by Pilate himself.

But with how much higher reason may we here speak of a good confession, when we cast our eyes on His *eternal truth* in its inexhaustible contents! Or does it not seem at first sight perfectly incredible? Yea, verily, in all the force of the word, it is a *king* who now here stands before us. Royal by descent, by anointing, by dignity, by disposition, by appointment: at this very moment on

the way to offer a right royal sacrifice for the accession of His kingdom, and to receive a more than royal crown. Yea, verily, it is a *kingdom*, quite distinct from all the monarchies of earth, that is entrusted to His hands. It is, indeed, established *in* the world, is appointed *for* the world, is itself called to triumph *over* the world, but not, therefore, is it *of* the world, in which it spreads itself. Its origin is supermundane, its nature spiritual, its basis moral, its duration imperishable, the bliss it offers infinite. Yea, verily, yet once again, men are not by birth, but only by regeneration, *subjects* to this King: none can be so who love lying and deceit; but every one, sooner or later, shall receive this blessing who owns a heart that searches after God and loves the truth. 'Every one that is of the truth heareth His voice.' This is testified by history; this the experience of each day points out: the contrary is maintained by those who contest the advance of the kingdom, but this awakes the hope of its final decisive triumph.

Yet once again, *a good confession*—most of all regarding its *enduring power*: or does it not ever afresh afford us the service of a support, a test, a spur? Truly, faith in the Lord in our day, opposed with fury never seen before, receives here a firm support in its own well-fought testimony, through which at the same time the obstinate unbelief of so many is explained and condemned as inexcusable transgression. But, moreover, an infallible touchstone is here given us, by which each one may try himself, whether or not he belongs to the kingdom of God as a genuine subject. And above all, we here receive a powerful spur to follow in the way of the good confession of the King given us by God, never to be ashamed of the truth, to fight for her cause exclusively with spiritual weapons, but at the same time to meet her fiercest foes with calmness. 'Wherefore, we receiving *a kingdom which cannot be moved*, let us have

grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear' (Heb. xii. 28).



THIRTEENTH MARCH.

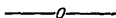
'And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad.'—LUKE xxiii. 8.

HOW now, amidst so many mournful figures upon the scene of Christ's Passion, do we at last encounter one who is exceeding glad? Herod, the murderer of John, glad when he sees Him who was greater than John? But already we know what this gladness betokens, and what new pain it shall occasion our suffering Master. Indeed, under all the pictures of suffering between Gethsemane and Golgotha, there is scarcely another which, at least at the first glance, more painfully impresses us than the sufferings of Jesus before Herod. This is now the third tribunal before which, within a few hours, we see Him dragged; and what a tribunal! A seemingly accidental circumstance leads to His being sent thither: perplexity and self-will, deceit and calumny, bitter enmity and politic friendship, play with Him their reckless game apparently unpunished: and all this with what result? Pilate becomes not wiser nor Herod better, the priests meanwhile are only more inhuman, and the Sufferer more an object for compassion, without the question in discussion being thereby one step advanced. Without aim or result a new drop is added to the cup of suffering: might not, we are almost disposed to ask, might not at least this bitter draught have been spared the Saviour? But how entirely different it becomes to us, when, after the direction of Holy Scripture, we cast our glance upwards, and with the earliest confessors of the gospel consider: 'Against God's holy child Jesus, whom He had anointed, *both Herod and Pontius Pilate,*

with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done' (Acts iv. 22).

Thus is the view-point from which this incident should really be contemplated, pointed out to us by the early Christian Church, and it may be of use to us: the Lord's sufferings before Herod are striking manifestations of the adorable providence of God. It certainly appears here inactive, and veiled in dark clouds; but yet, on attentive contemplation, one sunbeam after another begins to break through. Evidently the providence of the Most High is here at work, to cause sin to appear in all its hideous nakedness: as self-debasement in Herod and his courtiers; as deceit and malice in the scribes and the chief priests; as want of principle and firmness in Pilate, who, after the sad mission had returned, in one breath utters the two words: chastisement and release. But, meanwhile, circumstances so lead on, that in one way and another not merely the greatness of the Lord is manifested, but also the redemption of the world by His blood is hastened and prepared. How is His greatness specially apparent in the immoveable silence which the Lord, who had deigned to answer a Pilate, and even a Caiaphas, yet preserved towards this Herod! Nay, He will 'not give that which is holy to the dogs, nor cast His pearls before swine.' Although it had been the shade of John the Baptist gliding into the palace of the Tetrarch from forth the spirit world, the silence had not been more dignified nor yet more appalling. That silence, Herod, is thy doom, the presage of thy future judgment! Alas! can it then be so ill with this frivolous sinner, that even the holy, the compassionate Jesus leaves him to himself, and to his wilful, self-elected fate! He who considers this must pray: Lord, rather all, the heaviest censure than such a silence

on Thy side, whereby I should be given up to my own misery and ruin! But no, He is not come to destroy men's souls, as many as are yet capable of salvation; and even through the palace of Herod runs the marvellous way by which God leads His Christ to the throne, the world of redemption. As here the mission to Herod becomes the occasion of peace and friendship between two who had formerly been foes, so through the cross the middle wall of partition separating Jews and Gentiles was broken down, and both became united into one spiritual body. The return of the Lord to Pilate caused an increase of perplexity to the latter: we know already what the result shall be, but as with bared heads we repeat: God reigneth, and even by the voluntary actions of men carries out His own adorable scheme of salvation. How must such a memory reconcile us to many a riddle in our own lives, and prepare our hearts to accept every suffering which God sends on us, not merely that which is seen by our fellow-men, but, moreover, that which is unseen in the same spirit that Jesus did, and like Him to bear it silently! But, alas! in seven free arts men in olden times could become masters; yet in an eighth, the art of suffering, we so often remain incapable pupils. Let, then, the summons from the palace of Herod re-echo to us: 'Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him: commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.'



FOURTEENTH MARCH.

'Not this man, but Barabbas.'—JOHN xviii. 40.

APPALLING answer to the question, put in increasing perplexity by Pilate to the multitude present with him: 'Whom will ye that I shall release unto you?'

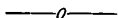
Fatal choice, between the mover of sedition and the King of Peace, between the murderer and the Prince of Life, by which Israel decided in favour of the curse, and rejected the blessing! May we not ask, How was it possible that the Lord bore this grievous affliction also? If every comparison were not here out of place, we might almost assert, that after the fearful conflict in Gethsemane no hour had dawned for the suffering Saviour, which with so much justice might be called the hour of His soul's agony as this. *Every* comparison with others—and this is too frequently forgotten—was for Jesus a species of abasement. Had an angel even been placed at His side, the Lord might claim that he should set himself at His feet. Only with three men did He compare Himself—with Solomon, Jonah, and John the Baptist; but even then in order to declare that He was greater than these. Just because He is perfectly alone and without peer, every comparison becomes almost deliberate misjudgment; at His knee He beholds myriads bow, but higher than Himself He knows but One, and at His side none may presume to sit. But yet the world, or rather Satan, ventures on this comparison; and he strikes the Lord upon the face with unclean hand, by naming Him, nay, by placing close to Him none less than *Barabbas*. Than *Barabbas*! Oh, this misjudgment wounds like a painful blow, but the decision even deeper! Imagine thou thyself renowned in the land, placed upon a stage of infamy along with a loathsome beggar; proud maiden, that thou stoodest upon the pillory side by side with one, the scandal of her sex; respected citizen, that thou sawest the die cast, if men should give more confidence to thee or to a well-known swindler. But enough: what is each comparison to the terrible reality of what that morning saw for the salvation of our souls accomplished?

And now, such a comparison with a *Barabbas*, *which ends in the rejection of Jesus!* Although the Jews, after

short deliberation, had resolved on the release of the Saviour, even the hesitation would have been reproach to Him; but a mover of sedition, a robber, to stand in their estimation some degrees above the benefactor of His people, above the Son of God's good pleasure. . . . Appalling even to our feelings, what must it have been to Jesus? What reads He in the heart of the crafty priests, the unprincipled governor, the insensate multitude? Why, should we almost ask, why exalts He not His voice with power? why employs He not the gift of miracle, which had not yet forsaken Him? Why . . . but we know the reason; in obedience to the Father He yields to His approaching fate. Full of love for the world, He consoles Himself that He has taken her place as an outcast; and although rejected by His thankless people, He curses not Jerusalem. Oh, may it be to us, as though we saw Him stand there, His glance now upward to the Father, then on the multitude, but most peacefully to earth,—as though we saw a heavenly glory encircle that shame-crowned head, formed of the rays of His obedience and patience, His self-control and love! To be so mocked and calmly to endure it, this is no shame, but honour; and whilst the dastard crowd spurn Thee with impious feet, we kneel before Thee gracious Saviour, who verily for our redemption suffered this!

Yea, should ye gladly kneel, who see afresh the Man of Sorrows stand beside Barabbas! Show it, then, through a better choice than that of the chief priests and their servants; and let the world know that, not Barabbas, but Jesus, 'loud and deep, re-echoes in your grateful hearts.' Ah! that endless hesitation, where prompt decision should have place; that faithless Pilate-heart even in the bosoms of those who tremble at the sin of a deliberate rejection of Christ; that hankering after the world, which ever takes part against Jesus; that sparing of darling sins, which in the sight of God appears

no better than to prefer Barabbas! It seems as though this history of the most fatal choice were singular indeed, but yet eternal. God forbid that it should e'er be ours! Something better we owe to Him, who on our account bore also this reproach. Oh, may He read in many a heart this feeling: 'I love but one, and it is He, He only!'



FIFTEENTH MARCH.

'Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe.
And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!'—JOHN xix. 5.

WHEN Moses, in the hour of his call, approached the burning bush, out of the midst of which he had just before heard the mysterious voice of God, and was on the point of beholding 'that great sight,' we read, 'he hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.' May not a like feeling fill our hearts on the occasion of this scene of the Passion, and must we not tremble to gaze on it with unveiled countenance? 'Behold the man!' what a saying, and what a meaning these words contain! Jesus, the object of scorn and contempt, awakened impotent compassion in the heart of a heathen, who steps forth as the advocate of the oppressed and persecuted One, to implore as with folded hands that at last it may suffice.

The King of the Jews crowned with thorns: we have only to read in a right spirit the combined testimony of the evangelists regarding this atrocious transaction, and to place ourselves mentally on this eternally memorable spot, in order to experience in some measure what can never adequately be described. The painter has seized his pencil, the poet his pen, to bring fitting homage to that 'head bleeding and wounded;' but what representation must not be infinitely beneath the reality! And the

reality, how much more deeply does it bow us down, when we consider who this man is, who so abased stands there; and again, how He comes thus to stand there; above all, why He must stand there before the eye of earth and heaven! No magnificent engraving, with the words beneath it, 'Ecce Homo,' can ever adequately express that which was already given us to contemplate in this prophetic word: 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.' So terrible is sin, then, in God's sight, that He will rather permit this unheard of suffering, than that it should remain unatoned. So irretrievably deep had mankind sunk, that only such a sacrifice could save them. Sin, and nothing else, had crowned that head with sharpest thorns, and *yet behold the man who crowned with thorns is still a king.* Yea, in royal splendour He stands here before the eye of faith, which lets itself be blinded by no false appearance, and also under the purple robe of mockery looks on the throbbing breast. Full of royal dignity, He is silent, and quietly controls Himself throughout the whole scene of His passion; royal is the offering which He has brought for the salvation of His subjects; royal the self-appreciation wherewith He allows Himself to be exhibited. He, the sovereign type of man, the vaunt and crown of humanity! Had ever king in his greatest splendour met so many eyes, won so many hearts, received, consoled, and hallowed so many subjects, as this King in His pathetic suffering form? And who shall count those whose souls have been secretly penetrated by these words: 'This I did for thee, what doest thou for me?' Ah, if it might be so with us as often as the touching 'Behold the man' finds the way it seeks, not to our feelings and imagination alone, but to the depths of heart and conscience!

‘Behold the man!’ in these words the Man of sorrows asserts His royal rights so long disowned over our heart, and well may it be best if He should hear as it were over Gabbatha the bells of penance toll mournfully, because that, in spite of such suffering and such love, we could yet be so cold of heart, so unfruitful in good works. How shall it become better, how alone shall it become holy and warm within? ‘Behold the man,’ remains the answer; look on Him with an earnest, believing, adoring gaze, till at the last thou seest none other than this all-suffering One, who thereby wins all love; the ice will not melt until it is brought as close as possible within the reach of the hot sun. Behold the Man, as thy Saviour, thy King, thy Pattern and Forerunner on the way which through suffering leads to glory. Yea, specially thy Pattern, suffering heart, which already perhaps has left off complaint to man, but bears what men know not. It has indeed been asked what has become of the crown of thorns, and the legend concerning this is unworthy of credit. But faith comprehends it; the Lord has Himself untwined the wreath, and on each of His friends He bestows one or more of the thorns, which often deeply wound their flesh. . . . Oh, thou who feelest it, behold the Man, and hear His voice: Follow thou me! Even so, my God—

‘One glance at Thine exalted Son
Teaches me to believe:
Thou gavest Him cross and thorny crown,
Such was His rough path to the throne
Which He came to receive.
Then sink with Jesus would I fain!
I know with Him I’ll rise again,
The depths to heaven shall cleave.’

SIXTEENTH MARCH.

‘Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.’—JOHN XIX. 10.

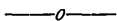
‘HE that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.’ What history is so rich in proofs of the truth of this proverb than the inexhaustible narrative of the Passion; and where is it more striking than in the last dialogue between the Lord and Pilate, how weak a strong man may be, but at the same time how strong a seemingly weak man may be! Ah, how weak the Roman governor here appears, with all his outward show of power and authority! He is weak in regard to the Jews, who cannot contemplate the martyr in His royal robe, put on Him in mockery, without again yelling forth, Crucify him, crucify him! He does indeed repeat, ‘Take ye him, and crucify him, for I find no fault in him;’ but to the attentive ear the tone sounds already much weaker than at the beginning of the discussion, when he had said, ‘Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.’ Evidently he is yielding step by step; and since it has come so far, none of the chief priests believe that even here he will make a determined stand. They answer with a fresh complaint, which yet more increases his fear; and weak as he is towards them, he yet soon shows himself still weaker in converse with the Lord. How little does he know himself, this man who, in presence of the victim of his guilty irresolution, has the presumption to speak of his power, and, moreover, of a power to release Him, since he does not dare to employ it! Even in the arrogance of the tone, the uneasiness of a bad conscience betrays

itself; and if at first we felt compassion, we begin almost to despise the judge, who is ever governed not by principle, but by surrounding circumstances. How weak, above all, nay, how completely impotent he is against the adorable providence of God, the Lord makes him feel in the remark with which He at last breaks His silence of an hour, and that, too, in a form quite within the capacity of the heathen mind: 'Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee *from above.*'

'Against me!' These words direct our eye from the pitiful figure of the governor up to that of the noblest in this scene, and the apparently weak shows Himself in all His power. How great He was in *His silence*, Pilate himself must dimly have felt; and we perceive more clearly on this remark, how an explanation of His heavenly descent was at once unnecessary, and how at least a Pilate had forfeited the honour of a reply. In silence the outwardly impotent here again governs the whole scene; He manifests a magnanimity of which a Pilate is incapable, and makes no attempt even by one word to save His life. With what dignity, on the other hand, He *suffers* that which even this relatively peaceful moment gives Him to endure! All around Him is in commotion, excitement, terror: Pilate is afraid of the Jews, the Jews are afraid of losing their cause, the servants are afraid of their masters the priests; Jesus alone is afraid of nothing, not even of the suffering of death, because His unclouded look is directed 'on high,' whence He knows that all power, even that which now opposes Him, has its origin. What is more, how decisively *He dooms*, just when He is on the point of being doomed Himself, we perceive in the sentence in which He completes His moral victory over Pilate: 'Therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.' Strange; the defendant has at once become the judge of him who

tries Him, assigning with infallible justice and calmness to each his portion of the universal guilt, and in opposition to the boasting vanity of the governor, putting him in his place with that last but determinate word—sin. What self-consciousness, what self-control, and at the same time what mild forbearance towards the man who will not spare Him, and whom He nevertheless warns for the last time! Oh, how deeply ought we to bow before so much majesty and holiness, which drew the involuntary respect even of a Pilate; we, to whom the question, ‘Whence art thou?’ has not remained unanswered!

How have we to learn from Him to be silent, when to speak is neither profitable nor prudent, to be sparing in our judgment over those who wrong us, and in all suffering not to look to men alone, but specially to look up to Him who perfects His adorable counsel by means of men! But with what calmness may and shall we, even when our future lowers most threateningly, bide our time, if the same mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus! Even the bitterest, yea, the last foe, the Christian may boldly face with this passage of assured faith: ‘Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.’



SEVENTEENTH MARCH.

‘When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.’—
MATT. xxvii. 24.

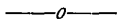
‘HAPPY conceit,’—so perhaps spake Pilate’s understanding, bribed by the anguish of his mind, when, like a drowning man, he caught at a straw as the last means of safety. ‘Dastardly weakness,’—so sooner or

later assuredly replied conscience, and conscience was in the right. Nay, we will not judge too harshly the vacillating governor, who here, yet evidently under the impression of his wife's dream, repents. We know that hot was the contest, weak was the power, good was the will, and yet not unclouded the light which arose before the eye of his soul. Many did less than he in order to snatch away the prey from malice, and they who had delivered Jesus to him had greater sin than he. But yet much less can we refrain from the lament: Poor Pilate, who will do all that is not opposed to his own interest, but not the one thing which duty and conscience command! Or knows he not that here a judicial murder is about to be committed, which he alone can hinder, through making use of his 'power to release'? Does he then really believe that a basin of water can suffice to cleanse his soul from blood-guiltiness, and that a theatrical exhibition like this can suffice to appease a furious multitude, who are eager for the horrible spectacle of an immediate crucifixion? Does he entirely forget that his deeds and his words are sadly at variance with each other, whilst with open eyes he nourishes a self-deception which will at once make him ridiculous and contemptible in the sight of every one? Nay, assuredly; not the blinded multitude alone must see to it, Pilate; for, verily, whilst thou warnest others, thou standest thyself blindfold and staggering on the brink of the most terrible abyss!

See to it; so too must we, for whose instruction and warning this sullied page from out the history of the human heart was written down in that of the sufferings of Christ. Alas, how far is it from being true that a character and a line of conduct like that of Pilate belong alone to former times! In the smallest as in the largest circles those are constantly to be met, who remind us of the words of James, 'A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' Sometimes it almost seems that in

principle there are not merely two kinds of men, but at least three: the children of light and of darkness, but intermediate to these, not a few children of time and circumstances, as little ripe for destruction as already on the way to heaven, and who are ever busy seeking out the safe middle between the broad and narrow road; conscientious, so long as nothing comes in the way, which at every cost must be obtained or preserved; afraid of what may burden the conscience, but at least equally afraid of the loss of favour or of honour with men. Their name is indeed Legion, who seek their happiness on the hazardous path of Pilate, and incessantly try to divide, where a final, decisive choice must be made at once. But never let us believe it possible, on a way like this, to progress, least of all that this way is really any other than the broad road to destruction! Consider Pilate and the Jews: originally the first stands far above the last, but finally what is the difference, if men from weakness or from wickedness become transgressors, and both go hand in hand to stretch the Lord upon the cross? May Pilate's example open the eyes of many who secretly pride themselves on the so-called goodness of their hearts, and show them as in a mirror what a world of wickedness is often hidden under high-sounding talk, and how easy it is to warn others, whilst we have all reason to tremble for our own condition! Well, too, may we more earnestly adore the love of God in Christ, who for such weak and wicked ones as we, has brought the costliest sacrifice; and well may we supplicate the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we in truth may see to it, but first of all for ourselves! The basin of Pilate is everywhere called for and filled, and ere we are conscious, we involuntarily plunge our unclean hands therein, and write then for ourselves an acquittal, —although, were such weakness excusable in others, it could not be so to believers, with their greater light,

—an acquittal which God will not subscribe. It is indeed less painful to grasp the basin of Pilate than to shed the tears of Peter ; but what avails it with a God who weighs with different scales than those of men that which appears before the eye ? ‘ He that covereth his sins ’—and this is preached to us with terrible earnestness by the history of Pilate—‘ shall not prosper ; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.’



EIGHTEENTH MARCH.

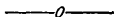
‘ Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.’—MATT. xxvii. 25.

FROM time to time there come moments in the history of men and of nations, which are decisive for years and for centuries. Is it not such a moment in the touching narrative of the Passion, to which this short but appalling recital of Matthew points us ? ‘ *All* the people ;’ so far had it not previously come in the trial of the Lord, since He was led to Pilate. Priests and servants, a great multitude even, might with constantly increasing turbulence have urged their furious cry ; yet scarcely could He deem that the voice of the people, so often called the voice of God, should make no better choice than that of Barabbas above the ‘ righteous ’ Saviour. But here, here demands, in the full sense of the word, the voice of the people voluntarily and unani- mously His blood, yea, unconditionally taken on itself the whole responsibility of this execrable deed, which the weak governor still hesitates to perpetrate. Here is indeed the place in which may be repeated the words of prophecy, ‘ Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid ;’ for from whatever side we contemplate the cry of blood, it pierces through bone and marrow. What unequivocal *accusation* it contains against the

weak Pilate, through whose vain theatrical display it was elicited ! Certainly he had neither expected nor desired such a cry ; but who else is the cause but himself that the insolence of the popular spirit no longer knows any bound or limit ? What hideous sound of triumph issues from the lips of the infatuated Jews ! Or knew they not that blood shed without justice would surely be demanded by the Judge of heaven and earth, and dared they still burden the heads of the race yet unborn with a curse like this ? What is silent then in every heart where this voice issues ? and, on the other hand, what is it speaks in them, which sounds like festal music to the prince of hell ? But, above all, what *sound of woe* is it in the ears of the suffering Redeemer, who heard it in silence, but not the less felt it in its full depth ! This, this is then the reward for all the 'good works' which He has shown them from the Father ; this the thanks of a people He has loved ineffably. Rather will men endure anything than longer suffer Him ; rather call down curses on the heads of children, on whom once His hand was laid in blessing, than leave to Him the life they vouchsafed to a murderer. Oh, whom does it surprise, that this ill-omened shriek echoes to heaven and calls on God for *vengeance* ; and that not the flames of Jerusalem alone, but eighteen centuries of wandering and scorn to Israel, have given an answer to that imprecation, at which even unbelief must shudder ! But who can then, in faith, pause by this touching incident in the history of the Passion, without adoring the overruling providence of Him who from the greatest crime brought forth the highest bliss, and even in this cry for blood, against all human reckoning, prepared an inexhaustible material for thanksgiving for all coming ages !

Yea, verily, the fall of Israel is our uprising ; but therefore, after the lapse of centuries, this cry for blood loudly warns us : 'If God spared not the natural branches, take

heed lest He also spare not thee!' They were broken off because of unbelief, and thou standest through faith, but yet only because, and in so far as, thou believest. Oh, what a call to every Christian nation, to ours especially, in this age of ever-increasing arrogance in Christ-rejection! The people who give up Jesus to death, release Barabbas; forsaking the gospel is for nations suicide. What a call to every Christian congregation, that in both church and household in reversed sense they repeat the cry, 'His blood be on us, and on our children,'—ever on us anew, but for the cleansing of our sins before God! What a call to every believer to make amends to his Lord and Saviour for such reproach and hatred, by increased love and faith! and when we suffer scorn on His account, to bear it patiently, knowing that it comes not from men in the first instance, though it is done to us through their malicious wickedness. Difficult this may often seem to us; but nothing shall be impossible if we have really seen Jesus as our Saviour, and in the ransomed Barabbas our own image. Then, certainly, the love of the Lord will press on us anew each day to show forth to the world, that in a higher sense His blood has not come on us in vain. And when the day's task is fulfilled, then He, who at the sound of imprecation held His peace, shall not be silent, but shall say to us: 'Come, ye blessed of my Father.'



NINETEENTH MARCH.

'Then delivered he Him, therefore, unto them to be crucified.'—JOHN xix. 16.

WHEN the traveller through modern Jerusalem visits the supposed sites of the sufferings of the Saviour, he is shown among others a white marble stone, inscribed with some half obliterated Latin letters, which,

it is asserted, marks the place where the last 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him, crucify him' of the Jews, in regard to the already rejected Christ, resounded. And, certainly, never did spot deserve to be eternally remembered more than this Gabbatha, where Pilate for the last time on this occasion seated himself upon the judgment-seat; but now only to perpetrate cruel injustice. Gabbatha, at the hour of Jesus' condemnation, to what shall we compare it, and with what simile represent this Lithostrotus? All that here presents itself before the eye, makes the impression of a stormy lake: at one side is a reed, bruised and swept forward by the wave; on the other side, a rock standing firm amidst the dashing billows; and from above, through the rent clouds, there falls a sunbeam on the troubled waters, silvering the crested waves. A combination of struggle and victory meets our eye, seldom equalled, never surpassed.

On the one side strife of *conscience*, and therein the victory of the most fatal *weakness*. Nay, Pilate has gained nothing, when he begins, as it would seem (ver. 12), a last direct endeavour for the release of the prisoner. The Jews already know with whom they have to do; and if there still remained a doubt if the poisoned arrow had hit the mark, a hasty glance at the governor is sufficient to show how his heart sinks together with fear. 'Thou art not Cæsar's friend;' and this friendship is so desirable, his displeasure so much to be feared; and whilst Pilate feels that he can resist no longer, his weakness adds another drop of bitterness to his cup of suffering, already so wrung out.

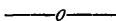
Yea, verily, the strife of *suffering*, and therein the triumph of the most exalted innocence, makes us contemplate Gabbatha at this hour from the other side; for who does not feel how the sorrow of heart of the Lord was aggravated, when He here beheld the law of justice

trampled under foot, and the God of justice insulted? But who does not at the same time observe how He was delivered, nay, given a prey, no judicial sentence at this decisive hour having been passed? Pilate simply orders that the demand of the Jews shall be granted (Luke xxiii. 24); but he does not take the trouble to justify this decree; he is weary of resistance, this is all; he lends an ear to the voice of the people, and condemns no one but himself. Thus it remains in testimony of the innocence of the Lord, 'who fights for us, and shall give us the crown.'

But thus we discover, moreover, high above this moving contrast between judge and defendant, the invisible hand, who here places the decisive stone in the scale of condemnation; and yet with one accord, in contrast with the strife of *sin*, we admire the triumph of highest *grace*. Is there a lower grade of abjectness, of mean dissembling and insensibility possible, than is expressed in this saying of the Jews: 'We have no king but Cæsar.' In such a stubborn enmity, which gives the preference to the most hateful tyranny rather than to the anointed King of the Jews, the hatred of darkness to light attains its summit. And yet, just the manifestation of the power of injustice clears the way to the highest grace, and Gabbatha becomes to the eye of faith the scene of exhibition of God's greatest glory. Yea, held in perpetual memory may this sixth hour well be, this preparation for the Passover; for here it may be said of Him who was greater than Pilate: 'Then the Father delivered, therefore, the Son unto them to be crucified.'

Oh, spotless holiness, that for the sake of sinners could give up this innocent victim; but specially, oh the depth of the riches of grace, which neither man nor angel e'er can sound! *Whom* see we then delivered up, and *to whom*, and *wherefore*, and *for whom*? We have already long ere now declared it, yet certainly, though

we should pile up all the stones of Lithostrotus for an altar of thank-offering, it were far too low for us to kneel deep enough before Him who thus has loved the world,—we had almost said yet more than the Son. If we felt something of this, we would surely show our thankfulness, especially through more earnest strife against sin, against the fear of man, and the love of the world, of which we here behold the fatal influence. ‘We have no king but Jesus,’—let this be the language of our heart; and the ‘behold your king,’ the voice of God, which ever echoes when we think of Gabbatha.



TWENTIETH MARCH.

‘And as they led Him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country; and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.’—LUKE xxiii. 26.

‘COMING out of the country.’ How wonderful is often the course of our destiny, and how small a portion can we reckon in the morning, of what the day shall bring forth! How little had Simon thought, as he carelessly and cheerfully proceeded from the quiet country to the bustling capital, that on his way he should encounter this unwelcome procession, and that the cross of one probably scarce known to him should thus be laid upon his shoulders! Yet the heart of man considers his ways, but the Lord overrules his goings; and it is as it were here interlined: *it is God who leads us on the way of the cross.* Does unexpectedly the sun go from thee behind thick clouds? Thou art enveloped in sorrow and suffering, of which thou hadst never dreamed; thou becomest literally forced through the course of circumstances to go through a path difficult for flesh and blood. Blessed art thou, if thou then believest and thinkest on

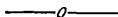
this: 'Man's goings are of the Lord.' How can a man then understand his own way? (Prov. xx. 24.) The course of the path may surprise, but the aim of Providence cannot possibly be doubtful.

On the way of the cross we find Jesus, as the Cyrenian found Him; at least we may find Him, though no longer suffering, but crowned with honour and glory. There is nothing which the heart more needs to feel towards Him, who has come to comfort all that mourn; nothing which is more sent to bind us to the Lord, and to make us conformable to His image, than just the sorrows of the present time, whenever, in accordance with God's will, it is borne in fellowship with the Saviour. And whenever, moreover, it may be termed not merely a suffering like Christ and with Christ, but for Him and on His account; whenever we, like this stranger in Jerusalem, out of grace are privileged in this world to bear some of the reproach that falls on Him, who feels not that this cross of Simon surpasses in dignity even a kingly crown? 'If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.'

Along the way of the cross we draw near to the heavenly inheritance. How extremely probable is it, that to this same Cyrenian this day, the greatest in the world's history, became the turning-point in his outward and inward life! Who can doubt that 'the father of *Alexander and Rufus*' (Mark xv. 21), well known in the Church of Rome, in whose behoof the second Gospel is written, became at a later period in a higher sense the bearer of Christ's cross, and thus saw himself compensated through eternity for the shame of a moment? It is noteworthy, that in the Epistle to the Romans, written about a quarter of a century after this incident, Paul greets there a *Rufus* (Rom. xvi. 13), 'chosen in the Lord, and his mother,' whom the apostle esteems as his

own. If here the son and the wife of our Simon are referred to, what surprising light does this single salutation of a household cast upon the result of that of which the first foundation was laid here in silence on the way of the cross? Thus the unwelcome demand becomes the cause of eternal gratitude; and let us not overlook this: if his wife were still alive so many years afterwards, then the first bearer of the cross after Christ cannot at least have been old, and it is as if, on being released from the heavy beam of the accursed tree, his finger pointed to this word of prophecy: 'It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth' (Lam. iii. 27). Good, yea, verily, both for young and old, provided it is no imaginary, no self-imposed, no well-deserved cross we bear, but one that God has laid on us; not without Jesus, but borne to His honour; not dragged, but carried on the back, with tottering limbs it may be, but with calm and patient spirit, and not cast from the shoulders ere we reach the summit, on which highest love will with His own hand loose our heavy burden! Good, yet once more, provided that meanwhile it never is forgotten, that not our cross, but only that of Jesus, opens for us the entrance into heaven, and that on the way of the cross we cannot possibly be purified and formed for bliss eternal, unless we daily learn to look up to the great Author and Finisher of our faith, who for us bore the cross, despising the shame. Oh, blessed consolation! He who here does not refuse the service of a Simon, lives now to all eternity, in order in the Spirit to offer the same service to those who climb the steep ascent bearing the cross after Him; and ever He so guides it that the heaviest burden rests on Him, leaving to us only the lighter portion. And should we murmur, if to us, even to-day, a cross were given to bear, though it should come to us as unexpectedly as came to Simon the task to which he was impelled by force? But, then, for us

these words spoken by the Man of sorrows stand wholly vain: 'Whoso will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross *daily*, and follow me.'



TWENTY-FIRST MARCH.

'Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves.'—LUKE xxiii. 28.

IT is a striking passage, from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, which at times is seen written beneath the picture of the suffering Saviour: 'Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.' Who can contemplate the Saviour, as He thus, laden with the cross of infamy, issues from the gate of Jerusalem, without experiencing something of the emotions of the daughters of Jerusalem, who bedewed the way of the cross with tears, kindly no doubt, and yet, as events proved, too quickly dried? Certainly this disposition is relatively to be preferred to the indifference and levity with which numbers, who call themselves after the name of Christ, are filled, even during the affecting Passion Week. Yet might the Lord, at the present day, repeat to many of us the words of the lesson of this morning, '*Weep not for me,*' because the sorrow is needless,—it is for the most part unfruitful, it may be even pernicious to ourselves. He Himself, exalted to glory, needs now no tears of human sympathy: we shed them on the contemplation of His Passion, often without real influence on ourselves; nay, many a one, set at ease by his own sensibility, and secretly content with himself, has all too early to his own injury forgotten that within, under a soft layer of earth, a hard rock may lie hid. Not for Him, but more for ourselves, must we sorrow in the contemplation of the suffering Son of man; and who would not do so who considers what sin deserves

from the great Judge, and specially what the sinner owes to his Redeemer? There is no judgment of God over sin so awful as that which we see accomplished in the crucifixion of God's Son: 'If this be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?' thus He Himself cried to us before His death: it is sin, moreover—alas! our sin—which cost Him so much toil; and have we not at least tears to bewail our guilt? He has the most sacred claims upon our gratitude, our love, our undivided obedience; and what has each of us, even the best, so far to repay Him? On this demand, well may something of the soul's emotion of the old prophet be awakened: 'Oh that mine head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears!' So often called, and so late in coming, if even now we are come indeed; so long in training, yet so little advanced; so patiently borne with, yet so stubborn and refractory; so dearly bought, and yet, if God prevent not, for so small a price ready to sell ourselves again. Oh! have we ever tears enough to bemoan the lukewarmness of our love, the deadness of our heart, the pitifulness of our Christianity, which in so many respects has become salt without savour, sound without power? Nay, we will not refuse these painful recollections; we will listen to the earnest question which the Lord puts not only to foes or friends, but moreover to unfaithful or weak adherents of His cause, 'Is this thy kindness to thy friend?' How much more brightly should the glory of the cross unveil itself before our eyes, if these were not so turned away from tears of deeply humble penitence. How much more abundant, especially, should be the power of the cross for real consolation and sanctification, if here more sorrowed after a godly sorrow? Therefore does the crucified Redeemer stand so low in the estimation of many, because they stand so high in their own eyes; therefore is the hallelujah of salvation so

seldom heard out of an enlarged and thankful heart, because for so many hitherto these words have been spoken in vain, 'Weep, weep sore for your treatment of me.'

Thus it stands: Jesus desires nothing more ardently than to dry the tears of the penitent sinner; but how can we really be comforted, so long as we are not among the mourners for sin,—yea, what avails it to assert that we already have received for days and years grace for grace, if meanwhile the heart has gradually become so cold and dry, that it seems as if the fountain of tears were now quite empty? Assuredly penitence does not consist altogether in tears, rather in humble prayer: 'My Saviour, though I have nought to show Thee but sin dwelling in this heart,—not even a single tear,—oh, teach me to forget myself here, and, kneeling at the foot of Thy cross, speak only of Thy grace.' But yet, He who shed His blood for us may and will truly look upon our tears in secret at His feet,—tears for ourselves, but, at the same time, tears of thankful love for His mercy, never too highly praised. Not only the daughters of Jerusalem, but also the Magdalenes, the Marthas, even the Marys, must yet continually, when glancing on Him and on themselves, discover something of that sorrow which He can turn to gladness. How well to know, that He who claims the offering, and deserves it, will also Himself prepare our altar for us! Lord, whatever Thou givest, or whatever Thou withholdest, preserve us from insensibility, when Thy love even to the death is spoken of, and give us what a pious Father of the Church has named 'the grace of tears.'

TWENTY-SECOND MARCH.

‘And it was the third hour, and they crucified Him.’—MARK xv. 25.

‘Nay, never will I turn away
 Even from Thy shame, O Lord of day!
 Oh, beauteous visage of my King—
 Gracious, most glorious, ravishing!
 Has print of thorns that bright brow scarred,
 Sorrow and shame the features marred,
 Till in it we no more can trace
 The Sovereign of the human race?
 Nay, never on the throne above,
 Where all eyes beam on Him in love,
 Has He appeared in form more fair
 Than we behold Him, even where
 The Man of sorrows meekly wore
 The crown of thorns, and the cross bore.’

THUS sings a distinguished witness to the cause of the Redeemer;¹ and who that has ever contemplated in any measure the glory of the cross does not join with him heartily? Nay, no other spot on earth affords such memories as gloomy Golgotha; there is no hour of such significance in the history of God’s kingdom and that of the world than the third, immortalized to us through Mark. The cross!—to our ear the word has now a clear melodious sound, because that Jesus hallows all things, even the lowest, with which He comes in contact; but otherwise, who can express what a combination of pain, ignominy, and execration was contained in it, even for the Roman, and yet more for the Jew, but, above all, for Him of whom the gospel testifies that He Himself ‘endured the cross, despising the shame’? Yea, verily, the crucifixion of the Lord fills a black page in human history, because it paints

¹ Alexander Vinet.

the foulest crime that Jew or Gentile—thus the whole sinful world—has ever perpetrated. But what a noble page does it appear in the life of the Redeemer, whose greatness literally ‘rises on scorn and reproach,’ and who here shows Himself to the eye of faith in brightest lustre as the lamb led to the slaughter, and dumb before her shearers! On the way to the cross we have heard the Lord speak relatively much; whilst they nailed Him to the accursed tree, or immediately after, He prayed; but at the commencement of His cruel pangs, the unspoken words but sound within His heart: ‘Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.’ Although no drop of liquid has moistened His lips since He set down again upon the table the paschal cup, He refuses the stupifying draught with which a compassionate bystander sought to alleviate His pain. Not only does He desire to endure the cruel suffering of death, but to taste its full bitterness, since He wills to be Himself to the end, and to be conscious of Himself. He accepts all without murmuring which Golgotha offers of the horrible; not only the nailing to the cross, but also the despoiling of His clothes and the society of His murderers. Yea, certainly in His case is fulfilled the Scripture: ‘And He was numbered with the transgressors.’

But well may we then here also speak of an apparently dark page of history gloriously brightened in the result by God’s exalted providence. Or what do we behold in the crucifixion other than the accomplishment of God’s gracious counsel for the salvation of a world otherwise lost; and where have we greater cause than here to adore the unparalleled union of holiness and grace in the crucifixion of the Son of God, and with the pious poet to exclaim: ‘Creation, as compared to grace, is the outlined, not the coloured face!’ Who can pay heed even to the relatively small matters in the history of Christ’s crucifixion—for example, the parting of His

garments—without, with hands folded in adoration, observing how the Scripture is fulfilled, and the counsel of God perfected through the voluntary acts of men; and who can musing stand by the cross without thoughts multiplying within, and the beams of light constantly rising brighter? The hour of crucifixion—how much has changed already, since eighteen centuries ago it dawned! That cross—what streams of spiritual blessing it spreads even at the present day in many a heart, and house, and community, nay, even in and for the world, which in pride and indifference turns away from it! This gospel of the cross—what might and what shall it yet accomplish in the world, ere it has quite fulfilled its course! The material for thought is too abundant: no hour of quiet meditation will suffice, a whole eternity is requisite. Oh that we might but have eyes, if not to see all, at least to see something of what God has given us in this crucified One, and hearts to know the love of Christ, albeit we have learnt already that it passeth knowledge! There is no sinner to whom there must not come an hour in his life in which, with earnestness unknown to him before, he stands by the centre cross on Calvary, and renders a personal account of his relation to this crucified One. He is no Christian who cannot make the motto of Paul his own: ‘God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.’

TWENTY-THIRD MARCH.

‘ And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was,
JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.
 —JOHN xix. 19.

OF Balaam we read in the Pentateuch that he was summoned to curse Israel, and was disposed to obey, but that God Himself turned the curse into a blessing for His people. Should we not almost think the same when we consider the history of the superscription on the cross, especially as it is more minutely narrated to us by John? In truth, the idea of some of the Fathers of the Church, that the governor, through the special impulse of the Holy Ghost, had dictated the writing, is to a certain extent comprehensible, so evidently does the guidance of a special providence appear. But it is principally when we consider the writing itself in the ordinary view of it, that we find an infinite amount of instruction therein contained; and apparently an element of slight importance, it becomes for the eye of faith one of the most remarkable incidents of the Passion.

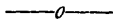
First of all, this superscription was a *manifestation of Israel's shame*. Nay, the chief priests are not entirely mistaken, who imagine that in these few written characters is set forth the disgrace of their nation: a crucified king is no glory, truly, to his people. Only one thing they overlook, that they are themselves the cause of the disgrace, since they had refused to acknowledge Him who had not merely said, but in various ways had shown, that He was the King of Israel. In three languages the national crime of the murder of the Messiah is written; and since the Gentiles had been the accomplices of Israel in this, the superscription declares in other words that the whole world is guilty before God.

The honour of Jesus is here treated in a way than which no better can be desired. On the crosses to the right and to the left a crime has been inscribed; here only a name and a title, thus nothing which can make Him worthy of death. The name and title are the expression of perfect reality, even to His own consciousness; and if it was obviously designed less as a stab at Him than at the nation, here, too, is an instance of man's evil designs being brought about by God to accomplish good.

The supremacy of God is shown, too, here all the more strongly, because on a superficial observation it might seem that the Judge of the whole earth no longer did righteously at Golgotha. Here the contrary appears: already at the first fruition the triumph of the Jews was embittered by a sting on which they had not reckoned in the very least. He who turneth the hearts of kings as the rivers of waters, now takes care that the governor shall remain as immoveable as he had before been easily led. In the language of the State, of civilisation, and of religion, the royal dignity of Jesus was here proclaimed before the many thousands assembled for the feast out of all lands and peoples that press around the cross, and the manifestation of this death and all its accompanying circumstances is thus promoted in a manner which in the issue cannot but be serviceable to the cause of God's kingdom.

Thus *the way of salvation* becomes in some degree already from afar sounded abroad to hearts desirous of it; for the superscription of the cross is nothing less than a gospel in miniature. A name is to be read here, but its sound speaks of redemption for all the lost: a title, but it brings at the same time an invitation to become subjects of God's kingdom. It says, as it were, to the man, God has sent thee a Deliverer: to the sinner, Acknowledge as such the King by God Himself given thee.

But it, moreover, points the Christian to *the hope of the future*. The kingdom of God shall come, Jesus shall reign: the gospel of reconciliation shall be brought to all peoples and tongues, and never shall it echo without captivating some ears and hearts. The world may reject it, God's counsel shall stand: the Faithful and True, moreover, testifies, 'What I have written, I have written,' and all the vain endeavour of the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees must co-operate to exalt the honour of Jesus, and to complete His triumph. Thus much has the superscription on the cross to tell us at the present day. It stood and it stands there for all to read: and thou that readest it, dost thou yet heedlessly pass it by? It was a stumbling-block to many: thou who here readest it, desirest thou that nought therein shall be changed? It was set up by one who was a heathen: thou Christian who here readest it, and hast received it unconditionally, wilt thou allow thyself to be robbed of it by any man? Nay, though thou maintainest that which it declares as truth, yet know that not the confession of truth, but life in it, gives blessedness. Pilate wrote and maintained the superscription in all integrity, but without himself becoming a subject of the kingdom of God. Be and remain faithful. And hast thou as with thine own hand subscribed the confession that thou belongest to Jesus?—let it be also in regard to this: 'What I have written, I have written.'



TWENTY-FOURTH MARCH.

'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'—LUKE xxiii. 34.'

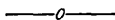
NO marvel, truly, that the words uttered upon the cross are repeated from year to year with heightened reverence, so often as the time of appointed meditation on the Passion recurs. Like a lovely con-

stellation consisting of seven stars, they shine down on us in the dark night of that suffering; or, if this simile is preferred, like the seven-branched candlestick in the sanctuary of Israel, which by day and night spread its twilight within the veil. As the soldiers at Golgotha preserved the garments of Jesus, so have the evangelists preserved the inheritance of His last words, and parted them among themselves. And of the last words, certainly the comparison is difficult, and may lead to injustice; but yet there is certainly no one who will not set an especial value on the first of the seven. None of the sayings on the cross is, perhaps, more universally known; no other sounds so audibly in the Acts and the Epistles of the Apostles (Acts iii. 17; 1 Cor. ii. 8): no other, too, addressed to particular persons, which has borne more abundant fruit. Yea, verily, the prayer of Jesus for His foes deserves yet ever to be a cause of vaunting for His friends, whether we contemplate it in its historical connection or with an eye to ourselves. In the first place, that the Saviour in that awful moment does not complain, does not hold His peace, but audibly prays to the Father, awakens our reverential astonishment. But this astonishment increases as we remark with what a disposition of soul, for what unworthy objects, with what powerful urgency, and with what rich results, He who was reckoned with transgressors intercedes for transgressors. The Father's name, at the beginning of the first, and running through all the sayings on the cross, speaks of an unshaken belief, and what He supplicates from the Father is the expression of the most fervent love. Not disciples, not friends: foes are the first objects which place themselves before the vision of His supplicating soul: undoubtedly, first of all the executioners who fulfilled the cruel sentence, but also in a larger sense all their accomplices both in the Jewish and the Gentile world; and who could here be called quite

innocent? For these He asks no punishment, no delay of punishment, but forgiveness: forgiveness on the grounds of the only thing which could be pleaded in mitigation of their crime: an ignorance undoubtedly but relative, and the fruit of their own guilt, moreover, but which yet might make it possible that the Holy Father should suffer these blinded ones within His sight. Nay, we are not surprised that the petition was answered in a way that calls us to adore the matchless riches of God's long-suffering. The first preaching of the gospel, begun at Jerusalem and crowned with such glorious fruit, was at once the great evidence that the suffering Saviour had not now pled in vain; and it has been truly remarked, 'Just in this is the greatness of His love shown, that out of what might have been a ground of complaint, He framed an excuse.' Not until forty years after Israel had stubbornly shown that they would not have this Messiah, was the threatened sentence on the city and temple executed; but yet every sinner who from a foe to the crucified Saviour is changed into a friend, becomes in a certain sense a new Amen of the Father to the intercession of the once crucified but now glorified Son.

This trait belongs, moreover, to the prophetic image of the Messiah; and when we see it so touchingly realized, we cannot turn away our eyes. What a Prophet and Teacher, who thus explains and seals His sublime doctrine of love towards enemies through His own example, in a manner which cuts off all excuse! What a High Priest in the New Testament, who commences His sufferings on the cross by expressing what undoubtedly had already been long in His heart, and what He, moreover, cannot refrain from asking whilst the breath has not yet quitted His heaving bosom! What a King, who thus conquers His foes with the weapons of His suppliant love, and in whom immediately His own words are

fulfilled: 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.' What He had already conquered from the world has been through the power of this suppliant and beautifying love; what He shall yet conquer, He takes no other path to win. Thus now, too, He lives and prays; every unconsciously blinded sinner has still before the Father's face an Advocate; this Advocate brings ever fresh forgiveness and blessing; and He who thus pled for His foes, what shall He not be for His friends? Assuredly, even the unbeliever must here seek in vain for words to speak His wonder; but how then shall the believer worthily vaunt the praise of Him who thus becomes the sinner's advocate, the redeemed's spotless pattern! Yea, spotless pattern; since can, may, durst any one of us, having before our eyes this touching image of pain and love, yet for a single day live on in wrath and anger against the most malicious of our fellow-men? and if any one shall notwithstanding do so, should we not almost be compelled to say, that at the least such a one knows what he does, and therefore his sin is even beyond forgiveness? Alas, forbid it Thyself, Thou suppliant, loving Crucified, and from Thy cross speak words of peace and reconciliation to all hostile and embittered hearts!



TWENTY-FIFTH MARCH.

'He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.'—
MATT. xxvii. 42.

NOT without reason has sarcasm been termed one of the most poisonous weapons out of Satan's arsenal. Jestings with sacred things especially revolts our feeling; but what must be our emotion when we

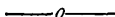
see this dart pointed against the most holy being that ever yet trod earth; and on Golgotha behold the crucified Saviour scorned and mocked by the outcasts of humanity! Even on the Mount of Horror no spectacle so revolting has met our eyes: here is, to express it in a single word, the uttermost in the whole history of the Passion; *the uttermost to which man can descend in wickedness*; the uttermost of insensibility in the people of whom it is expressly narrated, that they stood beholding (Luke xxiii. 35); the uttermost of baseness in the spectators, the chief priests and scribes especially, and after them, the Roman soldiers who mocked the dying sufferer, challenging the apparently powerless One by a miracle to save Himself; the uttermost of hardness of heart of the impenitent thief on the cross, who himself in the face of death ceases not yet the cruel sport, and emulates the other ruffians standing by in seeking who can wound deepest the King of the Jews bound upon the accursed tree. It is here as though the prince of hell had shown himself on Golgotha; and anew we think of David's prayer: 'Let me not fall into the hands of a man.'

Yea, terrible is it, how men of like emotions as we could thus assail the Son and Lord of David; *this is the uttermost to which the Lord subjects Himself*. Who can depict the weight of suffering which not unjustly has been termed the crucifixion of Jesus' soul, and by which certainly more daggers stabbed His holy spirit than nails had pierced His body! All this He underwent, how can we doubt, with perfect consciousness, but at the same time fully pure and innocent. Even at that moment the bitterest hate can find no accusation more; on the other hand, in their blind rage the miscreants stand forth as eulogists of the pale victim hanging on the tree. 'He saved others;' that still they cannot deny: 'He trusted in God,' they cry, and thus declare,

unconsciously, that all His life and work have made on them the impression of sincere and upright fear of God. Yet scarcely can they find words strong enough to cast at Him the mud of their contempt; and these leaders of the people go before the blinded multitude on this path of baseness. Oh! we could almost exclaim, why has the Lord not at that moment crushed the viper brood, by manifesting His power and majesty even in the way they challenge and provoke? Can He not then come down from the cross? could He not here have prayed the Father, and immediately angels would . . . But enough: just here we see obedience and love attain their highest summit; instances of these are frequent in the history of the Passion, but none more beautiful than these. 'Himself He cannot save;' it is a calumny, and yet in a certain sense a truth; He cannot, because then He must seek Himself first, and it is just perfect love that seeketh not her own. Firmly, then, the free choice of His love has riveted immoveably the fourfold nail into the cross: in order to save Himself, He must first deny Himself, and cease to be the holy Son of perfect love. Obedience becomes His watchword; and now He despises the shame, which He feels deeper than any one else, and all this poisonous breath merely kindles the flame of love, in which the sacrifice for our sins is consumed.

Yea, once again *behold the extremity to which God permits it to come*, when He gives up His Son not merely to the death, but also to what in a certain view may be termed more terrible than death. Here too He executes His adorable scheme, and evidently it is in the balance, according to the mocking words of the adversaries, to deliver His injured Son, but also to free the world from the power of corruption, which we here see mount to such frightful height. Yea, verily, He is a God who hideth Himself, but at the same time the God of Israel, the Saviour. What thanksgiving shall we render to Him

who permitted even this most dreadful calamity in order at such a price to save us? What offering can be too great for a Saviour who for our sakes was silent and suffered to the end, when all cried to Him: 'Come down from the cross!' Oh, let us bow deeply before His cross and bear ours after Him; let us through His power resist every temptation to free ourselves impatiently from it, until God in His grace unbinds it from our weary shoulders!



TWENTY-SIXTH MARCH.

'Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.'—
LUKE xxiii. 43.

THE second of Christ's sayings on the cross, preserved for us only by Luke, directs our eye to the threefold crosses, which on the most terrible day of the world's history stood raised on Golgotha. Ah, in what a fearful light *the power of sin* appears in our eyes whenever we gaze on the cross to the left hand! The unhappy wretch who is not afraid when he already approaches the brink of eternity, yet joins in the tones of mockery and hatred which on all sides are raised against Jesus! Thus he debases himself to be the confederate of the liberated powers of hell. Thus he aggravates the sufferings of Him to whom the glance into this world of unrighteousness must have been a second draining to the dregs of the cup of suffering. But thus at the same time he closes for himself the only way of escape from condemnation, and plunges into the ocean of eternity with a blasphemy on his dying lips. Oh that all might see it who misjudge the fearful power of sin, and imagine that there is time enough to turn from evil ways! See here a dying man in the immediate neighbourhood of

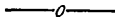
Jesus, in the full possession of his reasoning faculties, and to whom it has become morally impossible to choose the path of life, because that he himself has seared his conscience as with a hot iron. And sin dwells also in our hearts; and it becomes so easily a power in our life, and we know not, unless God prevent, where it shall lead us. . . .

It is fortunate that opposite this scene of terror another stands. How shines upon us *the power of conscience*, when we direct our gaze towards the cross to the right! This man also has been guilty of sin, and human justice had its course, but the voice of God has wakened in his inmost soul. It urges him to personal confession of sin, without his being led to make any excuse for himself, which still possibly might have been found for him; it incites him to rebuke the mocker, who even at this moment shows not the smallest reverence for the power and justice of God. It reveals itself, especially in the respect it manifests for the innocence and majesty of Jesus, in the midst of the deepest abasement. In this Man of sorrows, his sharpened vision perceives the Sovereign of the kingdom of God, and now his heart urges him to render homage to Jesus, and at the same time to beseech from Him one last favour. With the deepest humility he combines an earnest faith, which continually increases our astonishment, the more we place ourselves in his condition and surroundings. Here, where the voice of not one single disciple is heard, he proclaims boldly and loudly the spotless innocence and royal dignity of Jesus. Adorable providence of God, which not one single moment will permit *all* voices to be silent in the honour of the suffering Son of man, and here before the gates of death leads to the Sovereign dying on the cross the first subject, who like a pearl shall sparkle in His crown! But above all, what a striking evidence of the power of grace, which even at the eleventh hour saves the repentant sinner, where, moreover, this last has

nothing to give as an indemnity, and the transgressor is justified *by nought!*

Yea, this *power of grace* we see here manifested on the middle cross, the second saying of which sounds forth to us as a greeting from paradise. To all the voices of mockery this Sufferer without a parallel had returned no answer; but now He recognises the tone of a soul's cry to Him; now He will speak, but not to lament over His own sufferings. For His enemies He can but pray; for a penitent, He can do infinitely more. It is too small a benefit to confine Himself to the prayer and hope of faith; He promises and sends something yet better. With what majesty He, who now hangs upon the cross, the ignominious death of slaves, as Lord and Master dispenses the joys of paradise; but especially how great the love which this day promises the first place to a dying murderer! What must it have been for this unhappy man to see at once a limit put to his sufferings, and such a certain prospect unlock to his enraptured gaze; this very day in paradise, and with Jesus! What heavenly joy, too, must at this moment have filled the Saviour's holy heart, that He could thus shed a drop, nay, a stream of joy and comfort into the soul of this pitiable being! But also what a gospel here for all ages, even for our eternal consolation, revealed through the lips of the dying Saviour: 'Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out!' No one will be condemned except such as, like the obstinate sinner on the left hand, themselves turn away from the only Redeemer. Awful line of division here drawn between unbelief and faith, levity and penitence, judgment and mercy! Oh our souls, stand for a moment still at the foot of each of these three crosses, and be not at rest yourselves until this 'Lord, think on me' is repeated out of the depth of an awakened conscience! Happy for us, that He who listened in Golgotha has now come to His kingdom, and

has already prepared the joys of paradise for many a penitent! Yet there is admission for all who are not too proud to take their places beside a penitent murderer. Room even for you, room perhaps speedily, nay, it may be to-day. . . . Redeemed sinner, be at all times ready to obey the summons of your King; and, Christian, rejoice in hope!



TWENTY-SEVENTH MARCH.

‘Woman, behold thy son.’ ‘Behold thy mother.’—JOHN xix. 26, 27.

IF the first of Christ’s sayings on the cross showed love for His enemies, and the second love to sinners, the third exhibited the striking evidence of sorrowing filial love. ‘Jesus made His will,’ says a Father of the Church, ‘and John subscribed it.’ Consistent always: thus, too, now the Lord gives first attention to the spiritual claim before the natural; but when He has shown the penitent paradise in prospect, He delays not another moment to speak a word of comfort and of love to the sad mother who stands sobbing at the foot of the cross. Merely a single word,—the sufferer on a cross cannot speak much at a time,—but in that single word is shown an eye, a heart, a truth nobler than aught on earth.

Assuredly a loving care like that here shown *was needful for Mary*, who, with the three women from Galilee and the beloved disciple, visited the bloody scene of death. She does indeed *stand* there, strengthened through the power of faith and love far beyond human capacity, but nevertheless she stands *by the cross* of Jesus, the piercing sword in her soul; and even the most touching tones of the *Stabat Mater* endeavour fruitlessly to express what at this hour passed in her inmost heart.

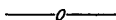
But how does it redound to the honour of Jesus, that He thinks on her at this moment, and in such a manner! Overwhelmed with His own sufferings of mind and body, has He yet an eye and heart for the sufferings of others? To His Father in heaven He brings the offering of the most perfect obedience, but at the same time He gives His earthly mother the evidence of the most fervent filial love. For the guilt of millions He atones, but moreover thinks on the necessities of individuals, and with the greatest faithfulness He manifests in matters apparently of small import the riches of His wisdom and His love. Not earlier, not later, but just now, when the least word becomes a benefit as at no other time, He speaks to her with kindness. 'Woman' He calls her, the title of respect and esteem, which she had also earlier received from Him, which at the same time spares her the contumely of being named as mother of the Crucified. To John He commends His mother, as He subsequently will commend His flock to Peter; to the faithful Jonathan, who to this closing scene had stood beside the greater than David, and better than any other could occupy His place, though not even he can fill it.

What a *benefit to John* is this injunction of dying love, which laid on his shoulders a heavy task, but at the same time afforded him an opportunity of repaying to the mother somewhat of what he knows himself to be indebted to the Son! What high honour is bestowed on him above the others! What an important school is thenceforth opened to him in his own dwelling! How much may he be for Mary, Mary for him, both of them for others, and all for the Lord! Yea, verily, He has Himself experienced it: 'Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.'

But is Jesus Christ changed, or may this last arrangement be termed a *treasure for all Christianity*? How strikingly it bears witness to His character as the perfect

but also willing Saviour! No more complete obedience can be imagined, but at the same time no greater love than this. Or wherefore this touching farewell to what was dearest to Him on earth? Wherefore else, than that He might devote Himself entirely to the salvation of sinners, on whose account this draught out of the cup of suffering must also be drained! 'Behold how He loved us;' us, His enemies through sin, but for whom He gave His soul to the death, heedless of the ties of flesh and blood, and parting from His sorrowing mother, in order that He might thus bring back many children to the Father's heart and home. And if we permit ourselves to be saved through Him, and if from enemies we become friends once more, behold how He has loved us; He, the merciful High Priest, who shows sympathy with our weakness, and spreads balm on the deepest wounds of the heart. Yea, that is the priceless consolation which also here from Golgotha streams into the bowed down soul; in the heart of the widow, who is a widow indeed; the lonely one, who complains that she has lost all; the weary one, who ever and anon fears to sink under the weight of so much woe. Thy Saviour has balm even for the wounds which we term incurable; Jesus perceives and supplies the wants even of that heart which on earth has found none to console and help; as the loss of Mary was softened by John, so now the loss even of a John is through Jesus silently supplied and compensated, whilst at the same time it is hallowed to our training for a higher life. Who knows better than He 'to speak a word in season to the weary'? Ah, if we would but go with the deepest sorrows of our lives to the foot of the cross, whence we have seen Mary and John return comforted! Let us then, too, in God's strength, take Him for our *example*, who thus with dying lips preached the new commandment of love. Children and young people, learn the lesson of love from the perfect Son of

God, who was never weary of watching and caring for others! Members of one family, seek that your households be more and more filled with the same heart and mind which animated that of John! May our natural love, like that of Mary and John, be hallowed at the foot of the cross, and our hearts, so often cold, be there warmed anew!



TWENTY-EIGHTH MARCH.

‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’—MATT. xxvi. 46.

AS with feet unshod, we tread in spirit amidst the three hours’ darkness the Mount of Crucifixion, in order to listen to the fourth of Christ’s exclamations on the cross. What are all the dread mysteries on which we have hitherto gazed, compared with that which here presents itself to our sad vision? Here is at last the deepest, the hardest, but, God be praised, also the last of what must be struggled through and accomplished. ‘Heaven covered its face before the mystery,’ sung the poet of the *Messiah*, when he came to this great turning-point; and who does not feel with him, that the arm of every created being is too short to sound the depths of this ocean of mental anguish? Yet all is not equally sombre; on the contrary, a remarkable mixture of light and obscurity appears, when, in the most terrible noon-day that ever rose, we linger on gloomy Golgotha.

The dark night of *Nature* we here contemplate, but therein the light of *Providence*. Nay, the sudden darkness, which cannot be fully explained by natural causes, is the token that God avenges even when He does not speak, and does not behold with indifference this atrocious deed. Deadly terror strikes to the guilty hearts of the adversaries; the mockers in the vicinity are silenced;

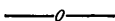
the friends of the Crucified take courage to approach ; nay, even for the Saviour Himself, though certainly on the one hand an increase of suffering, it is also on the other the curtain which at least for the moment hides Him from so many insolent looks.

This curtain indeed veils also to our eyes a mystery ; but in that dark night of *suffering*, the light of faith shines on us from the exclamation of Christ on the cross. The most terrible agony was here borne that finite spirit can imagine—the feeling of being forsaken of God. Even in Gethsemane it was, as it had always been before, ‘my Father ;’ here, for the first and only time, it seems as if this name dies on His fainting lips. Like a dark body between sun and earth, all the power of sin and death here places itself between the Father and Him. Not the relation itself ceased, but its blessed consciousness ; He is so lonely, so inexpressibly heavy and even comfortless, that He can utter nothing but a soul-piercing lamentation, the expression of the deepest pain, but at the same time of the most unshaken confidence. Who can wonder that Luther once, when in his meditation on the Passion he approached this point, after he had sat motionless for hours without having partaken of food or drink, at last burst forth with clasped hands, ‘He forsaken ! who can comprehend it ?’ And yet, who does not also perceive that He who in such a human manner complains, at the same time feels Himself the Messiah of Israel ; and like none before or after Him, in the dark night, hoping against hope, holds by the Unseen ? Oh, that ‘My God, my God !’ of a struggling but persevering faith ; it is like the soul-cry of the dying Son, whom the Father cannot let go, although He no longer feels Himself to be upheld ; who, from the greatness of our need, may sink into the depths, yet not without taking, as it were, His God with Him. Let unbelief borrow from this complaint an

accusation against the greatest of all sufferers, faith finds here an inexhaustible cause for adoring gratitude.

Is there here also a dark night of *sin* unveiled to our vision, as we think on the base mockery with which moreover this exclamation was answered?—the more gloriously beams the *light of grace*, which even at this inestimable price redeemed a ruined world. He was humbled to the lowest degree of shame and anguish in body and soul, in order that we might be received of God, and might never be forsaken of Him. Who can then understand how he shall repay to God the love bestowed on him in his unworthiness; how sufficiently glorify this Saviour, who for his salvation suffered even this? Even this!—he who can jest here must indeed be smitten with madness, and with trembling our lips express it; he who obstinately turns away from such a Saviour, is ripening for just judgment in outer darkness, in which he shall lament over his forsaken condition throughout eternity. But, on the other hand, oh blessed consolation for suffering faith, comfort even for the dark hours in which in unutterable bitterness we feel not merely what it is to be lonely, but moreover what it is to be helpless and forsaken! That, too, Jesus has known,—known in a measure which none of His followers shall ever taste,—and He lamented it in a complaint of which the Father alone felt the whole depth. Oh, let us learn from Him, even when the eye sees nothing but cloud and night, *still* with grasp of faith to hold firm by the Father's hand, and to repeat the 'my God, my God' in spite of all voices of flesh and blood, nay, even the powers of darkness! In the hardest spiritual temptation, God has yet the last word: not our heart, but He that is greater than our heart; and when also this darkness has been suffered through, striven through, prayed through, then shall the clouds disperse, and—it is the glorious fruit of this complaint—the vaunt of faith shall sound

forth from our lips: 'Perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but *not forsaken*' (2 Cor. iv. 8, 9).



TWENTY-NINTH MARCH.

'I thirst.'—JOHN xix. 28.

I thirst'—the fifth is the shortest, and in comparison at least with what immediately precedes and follows, it is less full of matter for meditation than Christ's other exclamations on the cross; and yet how touching to our feelings, how strengthening to our faith, how fruitful for our hearts and lives! The complaint is touching, especially on these holy lips. Thirst, which is the child's first appetite, the last physical sensation of the dying when leaving life behind; a suffering unequalled when it attains a height, and now endured upon a cross! Alas! since the Passover cup of the evening previous, He has tasted no refreshment; six hours have already elapsed since He refused the vinegar mingled with gall; now He can hold out no longer, He must admit: 'I thirst.' Touching complaint on the lips of the Incarnate Word, who in the days of His flesh has for others changed water into wine, who erst with a nod had beckoned forth fountains and rivers in the wilderness, and who was Himself the rock whence Israel in the desert was refreshed! It is a pretty conceit of a Christian poet, that on this exclamation of the God-man 'all the cool brooks falling down over the rocks stood still a moment in their course, then rushed down into the depths below, loudly complaining that they had not been permitted to assuage the thirst of their Creator in His human form.' But what is the representation beside the terrible reality? God's own Son had suffered thirst, more terrible to bear than hunger, and would have ex-

pired from drought, had not the compassion of a kind-hearted soldier moistened His lips! Yea, behold what is almost as striking as the thirst, the refreshment from such hands, with such a miserable draught! No angel, as at Gethsemane, no friend's hand, tenders Him this kindly service,—a stranger offers Him the last bitter draught, and even this is rendered harsher by a drop of scorn. Nay, it is too awful for our contemplation. . . .

And yet this, too, is borne, borne for the sake of sinners; and how much does the eye of faith perceive as it gazes on this exclamation of the dying Mediator? First of all, He is unquestionably a *man*, the actual partaker of our nature in its first and last necessities, who humanly complains, who does not hold Himself aloof as though He were a rock immovable, but stoops His head down to accept refreshment from a sullied hand of man. But then, moreover, this is the promised Messiah, in whom the prophecy of the psalmist is fulfilled: 'My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and Thou hast brought me into the dust of death.' In this consciousness He also suffers and complains here, and drinks in order the more forcibly to express immediately thereafter that truly all is finished. And how, even in this little trait, the glory of the perfect Saviour shines forth towards sinners! Or when does He complain of this thirst, and receive the miserable alleviation or refreshment? Not in the beginning or the middle, but towards the close of the struggle; first, too, must the last morsel of that food which consisted in accomplishing the will of the Father be employed, and now shall 'He drink of the brook in the way; therefore shall He lift up the head' (Ps. cx. 7). And after what does His soul thirst most, whilst His tongue tastes the proffered refreshment? But, indeed, a Father of the Church has said with truth: 'He thirsts after our thirst.' Yea, He thirsts after the salvation of

the world, after the glorifying of the Father, after the close; but above all, after the result of the struggle. He thirsts after the song of redemption: 'The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive glory, and honour, and power!'

And thou redeemed of Jesus, shouldest thou refuse Him homage, knowing for what thou hast to thank His thirst upon the cross? Alas, the world withholds this from Him, and has ever ready a sound of mockery for the crucified impersonation of Love, and vinegar for the refreshment of His friends! But the disciple is not greater than his Master; and the dying Lord received without murmuring or complaint the acid vinegar as a kind gift. Forget not this, ye rich and prosperous, when ye sit down at the festive table of luxury! He who had more claim than any other to choice of noblest gifts, accepted on account of thee a refreshment, such as thou wouldst hardly venture to offer to a beggar in the most squalid poverty. Forget not this, thou poor and needy one: thy scantiest meal is still luxurious compared with that last draught of Him who has known, ennobled, and alleviated thy poverty! Forget not this, yet least of all my covetous heart, when thou thirstest after the intoxicating draughts of sinful pleasures, what thirst was suffered for thy sake on Golgotha, and how this thirst was quenched! Ah, that this last complaint of the dying Saviour might draw forth from many hearts in reply: 'My soul thirsteth after God, after the living God!' This thirst will most assuredly be quenched with something better than gall and vinegar. Even here the saying passes into fulfilment: 'They shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more;' and hereafter: 'The Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them *unto living fountains of waters.*'

THIRTIETH MARCH.

'Et is finish'd.'—JOHN xix. 30.

HAST thou never observed, when watching by the dying, that a moment before the flame of life expires, it flickers high with more than common brightness? So may it be to-day, when we place ourselves with John close to the cross of Him who must be more to us than all others living and dead. Recently we heard Him ask a last refreshment, now we behold Him draw His last sigh. But lo, yet once again the head raises itself; ere it bends for the last time on the panting bosom, there sounds a loud voice from the cross, such as is heard alone from men in their full vigour. It is only one word, but a word embracing a world; and where it broke, as Jesus sunk, overcome by the power of His enemies, there arose, oh glorious moment, at once the sound of triumph: '*Tete-testai—it is finished!*'

It is finished; *the suffering is ended*. Although the sixth of Christ's exclamations on the cross had contained nothing else but this, who could have listened to it without perceiving at least something of what it must have been for the Lord to see this cup emptied? Alas, what suffering; foreseen before it began, passed through before it was endured, and not ended until it had attained such absolutely immeasurable height! God be praised that all this is now past, passed never to return. All the power of darkness is now unable to add a single link to the long chain of sorrow. Soon shall the breath leave the martyred body, and He shall rest, but never more to recommence this struggle.

Yea, now He may rest, for *the Scripture is fulfilled* in all that it had testified of the sufferings which should come upon Christ. Law and prophecy, high priest and

victim, typical service and reality, all had pointed to this decisive hour, and often it might appear as if the promise of salvation was delayed. But now, even the slightest feature which belonged to the image of the suffering Messiah is realized in the most striking manner ; and of all the promises of grace which eternal truth had proclaimed, no word has fallen to the ground. As on the morning of creation, God may say, And behold it was good, for—*the Father is glorified* through the life and death of the Son. What is this exclamation on the cross, but the re-echo of the declaration of the evening before : ‘Father, I have glorified Thee on earth ; I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do !’ No bolder declaration is imaginable, and yet none that can be less doubted. Nay, the Father is never so highly glorified, as through the absolute obedience and the infinite love of Him who here says : ‘Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God,’ and who, without wavering, has kept His word till death. At last, at last the pure and spotless Holy One among millions of the unclean has found one pure human being, who voluntarily enters into fellowship with sinners, and gives His soul a sacrifice for sin.

And now that sacrifice has taken place, *sin is atoned for*, and an eternal righteousness established which can outweigh the burden of sin of a whole world. What all sacrifices and all sacrificers could not possibly effect is here brought to pass, once for all, and is valid for the remotest future. The enmity is destroyed, the handwriting of our sins is blotted out ; nothing is longer placed between God and man but the impurity of our hearts alone, and for this there is complete atonement. One debt and millions of sins sink here in an ocean of grace ; in this second Adam stands forth the new humanity, which believes, purifies, and glorifies through God.

The prince of the world is now overthrown : *the world is conquered* through the Sovereign on the cross, who in

death gave His soul, in order to establish the spiritual kingdom of God. Not merely is the work of mercy complete, but in principle also that of the transforming of the world. From the cross shall issue that life which conquers death: the power is crushed which has hitherto separated it from God; this triumphant cry declares it no less than that other, never to be forgotten, 'I have overcome the world.'

And He who overcame, He shall inherit all things; for this exclamation on the cross cries also to us, *The crown is won*; and the most beautiful pearls therein, what should they be else than millions of redeemed?

But no; we will not make the vain endeavour to sound the depth of this exclamation of Christ; we only ask what echo it must waken in our souls; and to this the reply cannot be difficult. On this saying of the Saviour, one word on our side is indispensable, but at the same time perfectly satisfactory,—the *Amen* of adoration, of faith, of grateful glorifying of God; the amen of the sinner who lays his hand upon this peerless sacrifice; of the Christian who firmly maintains this word, in this word boasts himself, and in it goes from the world in peace. Only, this must never be forgotten: all is finished for us now; this great work of grace must also be completed in us; and by us must be fully accomplished, in obedient belief, that which the Father has given us to do. Ah, that the love of Christ might constrain us therein to do abundantly, and to be faithful to the end! Who knows but there may echo from our dying lips, however infinite the distance that divides us, these words of the apostle, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith,' and the crown of righteousness shall be bestowed on us through that same grace which here, both for and in us, is *finished*.

THIRTY-FIRST MARCH.

‘Father, into Thy hands do I commend my spirit.’—LUKE xxiii. 46.

YET one exclamation, but this is now the last. The one preceding it was the farewell to the world; the last of all is addressed to the Father alone: ‘Father,’ thus the dying lips articulate that same name of love which we have already heard in the first word recorded as spoken by Jesus when He was twelve years old, ‘into Thy hands I commend my spirit.’ By the Scriptures He had ordered His life, and with a passage of Scripture on His tongue He will expire (Ps. xxxi. 5), though He does not continue with the sacred writer: ‘Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.’ Redemption—He Himself declared it: He has, through His exclamation ‘It is finished,’ already manifested it; now He goes to His rest after the anxious labour of the soul. Another moment, and, according to the graphic description of the narrative, ‘He bowed His head and gave up the ghost.’ Submission to the law of nature unites with free will, through which this dying becomes both a destiny and deed. The ‘loud voice’ summons Death, who otherwise could not overcome the Prince of Life, and the most holy of hearts is broken by the touch of his finger. ‘Dead;’ thus hovers the rumour from one mouth to another, from one hill-top to the next, from the foes to the strangers; to the friends, both men and women, who were there beholding from a distance, and scarcely can believe what they far less can doubt. Dead; thus it reaches our ears, whilst we with bated breath have listened to His last words, and the thoughts have multiplied therein.

Jesus is dead,—what *deep humiliation* for Him who was in the form of God, but took on Him that of a

servant, in order to partake of all things which were the bitter fruit of sin! To every inhabitant of earth death is humiliating: a sentence which commemorates a trespass; but for whom, more than for Him, who had life in Himself, and yet is now laid in the dust of death? To be dead, really dead, less than the least of the miserable, who yet behold the light of life! Verily, there is here something opposed to nature which can alone find solution in the words of Scripture: 'He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.'

And yet to what a *glorious victory* this dying testifies, viewed in the light of the last exclamation on the cross! Here, where Jesus dies in the clearest consciousness, with undisturbed calmness, with child-like confidence, which at the same time may be termed kingly dignity, here is a triumph of unswerving faith, of redeeming love, of living hope, in comparison with which all other victories sink into nothing; and nought less surprises us than that, at such a death, Creation veils herself in penitence.

What an *exalted revelation* this death becomes of the glory of the Son, but especially of the mercy of the Father! Here, indeed, dies not merely the Martyr, but the Mediator of the New Covenant; and the whole gospel is a gospel of Jesus' death, which more than aught else is the life of the sinful world. Nowhere in the works of creation and providence do the riches of God's grace, and the spotless glory of His holiness and justice, shine on us as on Golgotha in the last hour of Him who in His holy body received the full penalty of all our sins.

That dying hour passed by, but not the *blessed change*, which begins by this great turning-point in the history of man, and of which the obvious change in heart and behaviour of the multitude on Golgotha is merely the small presage. What was it died at the moment when

Jesus gave up the ghost? Here dies the Old Covenant, obsolete and ready to disappear, when the New is founded in His blood. Here dies the ancient curse, threatened to transgression; the justice of the law is satisfied, the dominion of grace can now put forth its full power. Here dies the old death, because, for the Christian, death is thenceforth a release, in order to be blessed with the Redeemer. Here dies the old world, with all its glory, overcome by the hero whom we yet see lay down the two-handed sword. And, again, where so much dies in this death, what is in the same hour born? A new dispensation, of which grace is the keynote, and the happiness of souls the end. A new humanity, formerly at enmity with God, but now reconciled to Him through the death of His Son. Finally, a new future for the world, in which the gospel of this death shall not be revealed in vain.

Oh, joyful expectation, through this death kindled in the hearts of all, who really through God's grace have learnt to live for Jesus, and now also are able like Him, and in Him, to die! Why do we then longer complain, if here the daily dying with Christ cost us a greater struggle than any one imagines? The lighter shall fall on us the parting stroke, when the heart in silence, on His account, has broken with much. 'For the last time' is a sad word here on earth, but it melts into 'for the first time' in heaven. Let us then die at once to the good things of this life, yet no longer for our sins, and less still in them, but in fellowship with Him who gives His own followers boldness to commend like Him their spirits trustingly into the Father's hand. But let us to the end adhere to the supplication of the poet:

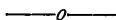
'When I from this world depart,
 Let me lose all else but Thee;
 When grisly Death shall hurl his dart,
 Let Thy presence comfort me.

When my soul sinks beneath the wave,
 With guilty fear and woe oppressed,
 Oh, Thou who cam'st a world to save,
 In Thy redemption give me rest.

Yet since that we are creatures,
 Whose life is but a breath,
 Show me Thy martyred features
 In the last strife of death.

And when with love most fervent
 To the cross I raise mine eye,
 Let me find that to God's servant
 'Tis a pleasant thing to die.'

—P. GERHARDT.



FIRST APRIL.

'And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent: and the graves were opened.'—MATT. xxvii. 51-53.

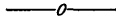
AS at the birth of the Lord, so likewise at His death, creation took part in that which altered the whole face of the moral world. We see the shame on Golgotha exchanged for reverence, and heaven and earth, as it were, unite in one point of time to do homage to the dead Saviour. Scarcely has the last breath fled from the dying lips, and the still rest of death has spread over the cold marble of the stiffened corpse, till at once the earth begins to tremble, as though touched by an invisible finger. It is as though the terrified earth refused to bear the inanimate mass: strong rocks are rent asunder as cobwebs, fear and terror may be read on the deadly pale countenances of countless multitudes. The rumour of Jesus' death penetrates the gates, the streets, the courts of the temple in Jerusalem; but the priest who enters the holy place to offer the evening

sacrifice, retreats in speechless dread: he has seen and heard what he had never thought to behold, what he feels he cannot explain. The thick curtain which divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy, thirty cubits in height and about four finger lengths in width, woven of the most costly materials, and, according to the learned men of the Jews, frequently renewed, is not rent from beneath upwards, but from the top to the bottom, and thus the Holy of Holies lies exposed to the sight of all. Nay, he who later in the evening twilight hastes outside, meets here and there mysterious forms, whose look, and garb, and manner appear to betoken that they no longer belong to earth; and from the open graves is seen forthwith a first gleam of the light of the resurrection.

We do not presume to ask for a satisfactory answer to all the questions which these signs, especially the one last named in the relation, causes to hover on our lips. The region of nature has secrets; the region of redemption has mysteries; who shall then explain all the marvels which appear and must appear when both these kingdoms come into immediate contact with each other, and at a moment unparalleled as this? Our life is a riddle, death a subject for questioning, the grave a mystery: who shall determine what the immovably closed lips of these risen dead conceal? We shall merely remark, that according to the most probable explanation of Matthew's narrative, the opening of the graves took place at the Lord's death, but that their occupants only left them after His resurrection, and that 'the many in the holy city' to whom these risen dead had appeared, at the same time bore incontestable evidence to the truth of the miracle. But do we now inquire, after this humble avowal of our ignorance, what is the tendency of all the signs in the hour of the Lord's death?—then, God be praised, we have no

unsatisfactory reply to render ; nay, what is more, whoever does not understand this typical writing, to him the whole book of creation and of Bible revelation must also be an incomprehensible hieroglyphic. Obviously, so long as the sacrifice for sin was not perfectly completed, the countenance of the Father was clouded towards His well-beloved Son. Heaven is silent, whilst earth rages ; all, all appears given over to the powers of darkness. But now at last all is finished ; it is now as though the Father were in haste to remove even the appearance of His being able to endure the shame done to His Beloved ; and though the earth be silent, the heavens shall without delay testify to His honour. Or what is announced by this solemn mourning of creation, such as was never seen before, but that here none other than the greatest of monarchs dies, and that His murder by His own people excites the awful anger of the righteous Judge ? What is announced by the rent veil in the temple, but that now is concluded a new covenant of grace and reconciliation, in which there is no longer a middle wall of partition between the Creator and the creature, but that there is established a holy fellowship, to which are called all the redeemed, who, released from slavish fetters, may now go boldly forward as priests to the eternal throne of grace ? What is announced by the rising of the dead, but that through Jesus' death, death as the wages of sin is destroyed for the redeemed, and life and immortality for the guilty are brought to light ? Yea, verily, here is a transition from reproach to honour, of which we in the history of Christ's life of humiliation hitherto vainly sought a parallel. The quaking earth but mingles a tremulous note in the song of praise which creation raises to her deceased King : the rent veil affords us a glimpse into the dignity and the work of this High Priest, whose flesh was rent even as that veil, in order that we might

have boldness, through a new and living way, to enter into the Holiest of Holies : and the arisen dead unite in spirit chorus, which sounds forth to us from the dark depths, and in all hearts must find an echo : ' He will swallow up death in victory : Lo, this is our God ; we have waited for Him. He will save us.'



SECOND APRIL.

' Now, when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. And all the people smote their breasts, and returned.'—LUKE xxiii. 47, 48.

NOT only in the kingdom of inanimate nature, but especially in that of humanity, a wondrous change occurs on the occasion of the Lord's death ; and there are some who join in His praises, from whom we should least of all expect it. We have undoubtedly an instance of this in this proud Roman, who had frequently looked upon death on the battlefield, but had never before contemplated a death like this upon the gloomy place of execution. Those along with him evidently shared in his deep amazement ; and, unexpected change ! the soldiers who had before cast lots for the garments of the Lord, end by expressing aloud and unasked the praises of the sufferer. Is it the truth, as many assert, that at this time a German legion lay in garrison at Judea : that this centurion with his band were therefore in all probability Germans : that thus the first Gentile who paid homage to the dead Lord was assuredly, as a German Christian, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh ? Oh, if he, our forefather, then praised Jesus, and glorified God at this death, how much higher must our praises mount, since we know so much more concerning Jesus than he, and countless times have tasted and seen

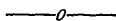
how refreshing are the fruits borne by that tree of life, the cross ! Christians of the Gentiles, see that ye be not put to shame by this first Gentile, who thus rendered homage to Him who died on Golgotha ; and join your confession to his, your song of praise to the mourning of creation !

Meanwhile, such a glorifying of the Lord will not be attained until in many a heart a similar change takes place to that which we are contemplating at this same hour upon the Mount of Crucifixion. We see here *levity* changed into *seriousness*. 'All the people,' writes Luke, 'that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.' 'All the people,'—do not imagine the number too small : ye might boldly speak not of tens or hundreds, but of thousands and tens of thousands. At this feast of the Passover the population of Jerusalem had mounted to little less than two millions. Who is there among all these who has not heard of Jesus ; who has not been urged to visit Golgotha, by a desire to see the close of His career ; who has not felt in a greater or less degree what the triumphant cry of the Lord, what the signs of the Father betokened ? Yea, verily, the mists are about to disperse, the scales are about to fall from their eyes. What have they seen, and done, and deserved of the Judge, who most certainly doeth righteously ? All that takes place here causes them a fearful foreboding ; now that the storm of passion is hushed, the voice of conscience begins to speak ; and it is the nature of remorse constantly to cry aloud : 'Weep for yourselves and for your children.' It is another sensation than that wherewith only a few hours ago, urged by mad fury, hatred, or curiosity, they forsook the proud capital city ! Yea, even the mortal terror on their pallid countenances is an involuntary homage to the dead Christ ; and it is to us almost as if at the close of the

preparation of this gloomy Passover, we hear at intervals the commencement of the eager question of the day of Pentecost: 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'

'All the people smote their breasts;' touching, deeply touching scene! There appear thus in this people, albeit the feeling was not equally pure, or deep, or permanent in all, to have been absolutely none who remained wholly unmoved; who said of the Man of sorrows, like the chief priests to Judas, 'What is that to us?' who were too proud to confess guilt, too cold to be kindled by the sufferings of Jesus—too dull, in a word, to listen when the Almighty speaks. Of such, as far as we read, there stood none on the bloody Mount of Crucifixion; they are only met with later among the pilgrims to Golgotha. Can there be actually those among ourselves who return from visiting in spirit this scene, I say not without the external bearing, but without the penitent heart, of this deeply affected multitude? 'All the people;' striking evidence of what the glance of the dying Saviour was able to effect on the most stubborn and careless heart, if not closed once for all to real soul-penetrating earnestness. But want of earnestness, is it not as true as mournful, this is the destroying cankerworm, which in so many cases gnaws the fruit of the Passion sermon; this is the shield which intercepts the arrow of the word, causing it to fall blunted to the ground; the misfortune of our times that in belief and unbelief not two directions alone are perceived, but a great variety, out of which each may choose that which seems most agreeable to himself. Oh thou, who art so liberally minded, that thou believest that there are two ways of faith, which both lead to life, the one merely somewhat earlier, the other somewhat later, how shall thine eyes at last be opened, when thou shalt perceive too late that there is but one way, and thou, alas, hast missed it! Oh, thou careless sinner, who art too much pressed by the weight of so many concerns

and so many pleasures even to take breath a moment and ponder on the touching subjects of meditation during Passion Week, how shall thy laughter be changed into pain, when at once all graves, like yon around Golgotha, are opened, and thou beholdest Him whom thou hast pierced through thy sins! Oh, thou heedless hearer of the gospel, who hast again made the sorrowful journey from Gethsemane to Golgotha, without any change for thee except that thou art two months older, how shall this penitent multitude one day arise in the judgment and loudly testify against thee! Since this has not already taken place, thank God, tremble now for fear, and glow with love to the Lord! If thou canst not yet return thence with the words, 'I have obtained mercy,' let it at least be with the prayer, 'Lord, have mercy on us.' Be not thou harder than the rocks which rent; and ye who are spiritually dead, arise from your dark grave of sin! Or is there yet a distinction needed? Well then, the multitude departed from Golgotha, remain ye there this quiet week, yea, linger here with your whole heart!



THIRD APRIL.

'And all His acquaintance, and the women that followed Him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.'—LUKE xxiii. 49.

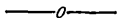
SHOULD we, as we certainly desire to do, pass this week of special and solemn devotion as the ancient Church prescribed, we must, even after we have seen the Lord die, constantly return to Golgotha, and assuredly we could place ourselves in spirit in no better circle than in that of His first friends, with whom each of the evangelists makes us more or less familiar. As formerly we saw shame changed into reverence, so now, on this memorable evening in Golgotha, we see hatred transformed into love.

Hatred—who has ever seen it in more hideous, woful, devilish shape, than it here assumes around the Saviour's cross? But all stumbling-blocks are gone when we again return to Calvary; the foes have disappeared, the friends alone remain behind. The friends; nay, alas! the disciples at least seem to be far to seek. So widely are the sheep dispersed, that even the death of the Shepherd cannot collect them; for this the miracle of His resurrection is requisite. Yet all His acquaintance stand at a distance, and among these our eye observes with satisfaction the little group of women, His friends from Galilee. Their names are given us in the Gospel; but the hearts, ah! who can venture to depict what passes there? If I may guess, then their first feeling is one of relief, that now at last—and yet, on the other hand, how awfully soon!—that fearful suffering is ended. Nay, when it reached such height unspeakable, they might not desire that it should longer endure; they rejoiced, though not without tears, when the echo of the 'great voice' reached their attentive ears. Must it not have thrilled through and elevated their feelings, when the voice of nature spoke to the honour of their departed Lord, and the first sigh of penitence arose from the awakened hearts of the multitude? But no, their eye no longer is directed to a world to which in a certain sense they are dead, since the friend of their soul is sinking. Unshrinkingly they gaze from yon detached height up to that motionless body, the central point of their desire and sorrow. At present they are not capable of comfort, or it must be the comfort contained in the thought that He is now beyond all suffering. But already the tears which they shed are the interpreters of their ardent feeling, and at the same time fresh pearls in the crown of Christ. Such tears are only wept when in one we have lost our all; and the loud sobs of His Galilean friends are no less a testimony to the greatness of Jesus than are the smothered sighs of the

penitents returning to Jerusalem. If yet anything of pain can become joy, it is the hope that they may be permitted to show that love and homage to the dead, which they can no more devote to the living. In this hope they gather courage when night shall fall, again to tread Golgotha, now deserted by the crowds that thronged it. Oh, marvellous power of attraction, which even the sacred corpse of the Lord still exercises! Yet once again there is much changed on Golgotha: a moment since there stood there a few loving souls, lost amidst thousands of adversaries; now hatred is wearied, but not so love. Enmity departs, but friendship lingers!

At least stand not behind these first friends of the Lord, these women of Galilee, ye disciples of Christ who recently have been considering what these saw and heard on Golgotha. Behold, behold in these first-fruits of the gospel how much faith in Christ has sometimes cost, but also how abundantly it rewards! Who can contemplate them, and his first feeling not be envy and admiration, his second a holy shame? Alas, in what degree the cross was an offence to them we have but a faint idea; in regard to the object of this crucifixion we may perhaps give a reply, which, weighed in the golden scale of strictest rectitude, would be found no scruple too light; but their love, faith, courage, where are these to be found in the midst of us, and how few feel and accomplish for their living Lord the half of what these others did for theirs when dead? How few!—then, in the strength of God mayest thou become one of the few; and may the number of Christians be increased to whom much is given, because ye have loved much! Let all hatred, all selfishness, all discord within, give way before this powerful glow of love, which many waters cannot quench! Sisters, in these women behold your instructresses; and brothers, be not longer put to shame through feeble women! Oh, it is good for us even at

the present day sometimes to crowd around the cross of the Lord. But how much closer should we be bound together, how much more well-pleasing to God and to His Christ, if amongst us no hearts beat with other sentiments than those called forth by the fervent glow of love shown by these Galilean women !



GOOD FRIDAY—FOURTH APRIL.

‘Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.’—GAL. ii. 20.

HERE we stand again on the spot where none of us approach for the first time, though doubtless many for the last ; and let us, in company with all who, though in weakness, yet in unfeigned love, surround the Saviour’s cross. Good Friday, ‘the day of the cross,’ has received both these names from the ancient Church ; the dying day of Him whose death is the life of the world ; the commemoration day of a love which exceeds all thought and thanks ; the great day of atonement of the New Dispensation, of which it may so much more truly be said than of the Old : ‘This shall be to you a Sabbath of rest, that ye may humble your souls,’ Lev. xvi. 31. How is it possible that there can be Christians who allow it to pass unmarked, and busy themselves with their farm or with their merchandise as on other days, as if absolutely nothing had occurred on it worthy of being held in memory ! How can we forget the dying day of one we love so much, without accusing ourselves of insensibility ; and should not this saying of Jesus, ‘Behold, I have been dead,’ re-echo in the depths of our souls ? Ah, there is indeed room this day to repeat the sad complaint : ‘Out of love immeasurable hast Thou done so much, and now art Thou forgotten, and no one thinks of Thee’ (Novalis). No one ! nay,

thank God, it is not yet so bad as this, nor shall it be throughout eternity. There yet beat to-day innumerable hearts against the cross of Golgotha; there yet gaze to-day millions of eyes upon this Man of sorrows, wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; yet in the stillness of this day that paradox shall be understood and accomplished: 'Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.' Joy, but born of sadness; sadness, but leading to joy; the genuine temper of Good Friday, it shall be ours, it shall be mine, if I may in some degree comprehend that passage of meaning infinite: 'Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.'

Yea, the love passeth knowledge of the champion and sufferer unparalleled, whom we now follow as it were hour by hour: it was love to a sinful world which made Him die upon the cross; 'for us' millions now repeat whilst gazing on the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. But yet what first gives to the gospel of reconciliation the true living power, and makes Good Friday to us the best, the most blessed day of the whole year, is that great 'for me' which was the sinew and soul of the whole spiritual life of Paul. Even for me, as truly as I am a man and a sinner, but through the grace of God may be termed a believer and a redeemed one; for me, as positively and certainly as I can hear in spirit afresh that great saying, 'It is finished.' This is the highest vaunt of faith on the recollection of the death of the Saviour, and to this vaunt the eternal gospel gives us a right, if indeed the heart is upright before God. 'For me;' certainly it cannot be comprehended, and it is often difficult to believe it even on the testimony of God, when at times the soul sinks under the perception of its own guilt and misery. But is not this just the blessing of this day, that it calls us to look entirely away from ourselves and only up to Him, whose grace is an ocean in

which to hide from sin, and where we may, moreover, get rid of our sins, and rejoice, not indeed in what we ourselves are, but in what a merciful God has bestowed on us in Christ *notwithstanding!* Nay, my Redeemer, thus the day speaks to me afresh or for the first time, it may be difficult to believe, but it is not impossible when I think on the riches of Thy love, the truth of Thy word, and the depth of my misery. Trembling, but not irresolute, I lay my hand upon Thy sacrifice; weeping, but not in despair, I bow my knee beside Thy cross. That Thou canst love me, such as I am, seems more and more astonishing; but I must, I may, I will believe it, hoping against hope, and I cling to the cross even as though it had been set up solely for me. Thou didst suffer and die for my believing forefathers, but not more for them than for me. For the greatest of sinners who ever found mercy, but not more for these than for me. And I, were I a hundred times poorer, more unworthy, or more wretched than I have ever known myself to be, yet so true the love which made Thee die upon the cross; Thou hast died there *for me!*

Oh, when by the Holy Spirit we are brought to know *something* of this, then awakens a sorrow over our past sins, such as we have never felt before; then blazes forth the fervour of a new love, which makes life young again, and quite transforms it; but then there also steals into the adoring heart a holy peace beyond expression, which reconciles us to all things we find in life, and causes us to die with the eye fixed on our expiring Lord. Oh blameless Lamb of God, tortured and slain for my sins! Jesus, bestow on me Thy peace on my path through life, my path to the cross, my path to the grave!

‘ Fearless I follow Thee through death’s dark shade,
Take Thou my hand and lead me home with Thee.
My last word to Thy glory shall be said,
My last look upward to Thy cross shall be!—A. MONOD.

FIFTH APRIL.

'For that Sabbath day was an high day.'—JOHN xiv. 31.

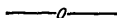
THE great Sabbath ; thus has the Christian Church from early times designated with reverence this day, and consecrated it not merely to the public worship of God, but more especially to silent meditation. And when, indeed, should we be more disposed for it, than when we, weary of gazing on the long path of suffering, may now rest beside the sacred grave, where the Lord of the Sabbath has slept His last sleep ! This was indeed the great Sabbath on which He rested from the labour and conflict of His soul : it remains great to all, who in the final resting-place of this unparalleled sufferer contemplate at the same time the grave of their own sins. Who can in spirit pass through the still Friday evening on Golgotha, and not join the small company of friends who seek to show a last respect to the mangled remains of their Master, and go forward with the women to watch by the grave ? Thank God, we may go thither with quite different feelings from these sad mourners, to whom faith and hope were dead, and only love remained ! We know already that the seal is broken, the stone rolled away, but yet to-day we can least of all forget : He who now lives to all eternity, was really dead on our account, and like the least in worth of Adam's children, slumbered in the heart of the earth. Therefore rest ye too, our souls, and let something of the peace enjoyed of this great Sabbath descend upon your dark and troubled hearts. Jesus died ; thus all is now finished that was needful for your salvation, and, like the women at the sepulchre, ye must lose yourselves in contemplation of the love which passeth knowledge. Jesus went to the grave ; this is the ground

of His saints' confidence, they enter into peace, they shall rest in their graves, each one walking in his uprightness. 'There,' so seems a soft angelic voice to whisper from out the garden where Joseph of Arimathea had hewn his tomb,—'There the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest; there the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor.'

In the garden of our life, too, is a grave, not a new one, but an old, in which already many are laid who were precious to us; yet what harm to such as believed in Christ? The grave of Joseph was nigh unto Jerusalem, ours is close to the heavenly city. The grave is not a boundary, but an entrance; and if in and around us there have been many changes, since for the first time we tarried in Gethsemane and on Golgotha, yet there is one change which this great Sabbath promises us with infallible certainty shall take place, which in every respect shall be an improvement. Here we toil and struggle, not seldom in the sweat of our brow; and each day of our lives, with all our toil and drudgery, all of us spin as with our own hand a new thread of the shroud which we shall soon require; but weariness and strife are still but the next to the last words of the story of our earthly life; the last shall be like that of Jesus, rest. Like a sunset in solemn majesty was His death; like a sunset shall be the death of each one of His followers; but we know that after the sunshine comes the shadow, after the labours of the week the Sabbath, and thus happiness is in store for us, the rest which shall come to us.

There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God, a rest won through the cross of Jesus, guaranteed through the sepulchre of Jesus. Christians, cross-bearers, is your prospect of eternal rest secure? Oh, go forth then boldly through the noonday and the evening of your life to meet the night! The light of faith shall not fail your sight; the star of hope is about to shine above

the tomb on you ; and the bond of love which knits you to the Lord, and to all who are His in heaven and earth, is stronger than death and the grave. Already you hear, perhaps in the vicinity of the holy sepulchre, whilst all becomes more still, at shorter and shorter distance the Sabbath bell invite you to rest in Jesus. Oh, who would not seek diligently to enter into this rest ? who does not feel as if all other wishes in his heart were silenced before that calm desire after this peace, which everywhere else he seeks in vain ? My Saviour, who hast finished all things for us, complete Thyself amidst each struggle the work of Thine own grace within ; and thus, where for Thyself a great Sabbath has been prepared, lead us Thyself through the mists of our last night to the light of an eternal morning !



FIRST DAY OF EASTER—SIXTH APRIL.

‘He is not here : for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.’—MATT. xxviii. 6.

YET once again we turn back to the sacred tomb, but now with how different a feeling from that which we experienced there two days ago ! Yet once again we join ourselves in spirit to the small group of women, the friends of Jesus, who on the first morning of Easter went forth with costly spices in their hands, and heavy care upon their hearts regarding who should roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre ; but we know already the stone is rolled away for ever, and in the place where Jesus had lain there whispered angel voices : ‘He is not here ; He is risen.’ Be welcome to us, thrice welcome glorious Easter morning, most ancient and most beautiful of all Church festivals, which without you could not subsist ! Be blessed to us, gospel of the resurrection, glad tidings of eternal life which echo forth

to us from out the open grave! Be welcome to us, Conqueror of death, who there to the eye of faith from the dark sepulchre steps forth to speak unto Thy Church this marvellous saying: 'I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore!' Well may now the song of triumph sound: 'The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner.' Well may it be with us as with John in Patmos, when he heard the heavenly voice exclaim: 'Weep not; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed!' Nay, more glorious victory than that of this third morning, earth never yet beheld; the festival of Easter is a triumphal feast in all the force of the word.

Here, first of all, *truth triumphs over falsehood*. If Christ had not arisen, the victory would have been to lying and deceit, which falsely accused Him, though innocent condemned Him, even after His death named Him a 'deceiver.' But, God be praised, it is shown also here, truth may be buried but cannot be consumed in the grave! It would sooner have been possible to roll a stone against the heavens to hinder the sun to rise, than to keep Him back who is Himself the Resurrection and the Life. With the King of truth, truth itself comes forth to light out of the sealed tomb; and it is seen how He, the Son of God, the faithful and true witness, was the perfect Saviour of sinners.

Yea, the Saviour—because here triumphs equally *grace over sin*. 'It is finished,' exclaimed the combatant of Golgotha; yea, verily, 'It is finished,' says, on the third morning, the Father, whilst He places the crown of glory on the head of the Conqueror of the power of sin. The sacrifice offered for the iniquity of the world is accepted and approved; and that same apostle who desired to know nothing else except Christ Jesus and Him crucified, has nevertheless said: 'Yea, *rather* that is risen again' (Rom. viii. 34). How could a dead Saviour, who had

not risen, have been able to reconcile us to God, to imbue us with new life, to be our advocate with the Father? But now Jesus lives, and the resurrection is at the same time the amen of God, and the subject of Hallelujah to redeemed humanity.

And this hallelujah shall never cease; for here triumphs, last and most glorious of all, the victory of *life over death*. If death had been irrevocably the last word of the history of Jesus, who durst then speak with infallible certainty of life and immortality? But now 'life is revealed;' thus sounds the gospel of resurrection to us, as the light of the joyful Easter sun arises, and the dawn of an eternal day gleams on us from the darkest heavens. Now that the Head has arisen, it is impossible that the limbs should remain subjected to the power of death: the first Easter morning is a token and pledge of the salvation which the last completes for ever. Sing then now, O my soul, the psalm of life in this valley of the shadow of death! Arise with the Prince of life to a new life, in which the old power of sin and death is overcome; and journey onwards dauntless towards thine own grave, lighted on the way by the glory of Christ's resurrection! 'He goeth before you into Galilee, there shall ye see Him;' this declaration of the first Easter discourse belongs in a higher sense to you, ye children of the Resurrection, who shall behold your glorified Redeemer! Oh, go ye also forth and bring His disciples word; tell them He liveth! Go hence with great joy, 'yet without fear,' if ye have sought Jesus who was crucified; and ye even who are silent, let not Luther's song of triumph die on your lips:

'Wrestling, battled Death and Life;
Mountains quaked to see the strife,
And veiled the noonday sun.
But Life at last the victory won:
Jesus' death has every sin,
Nay, Death itself slain triumphing.
Hallelujah!'

SEVENTH APRIL.

'Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?'—JOHN xx. 15.

THERE is but one thing more beautiful than the joyful message of the angel of Easter; the first words spoken by the risen Lord Himself, by which He turns the sorrow of His followers into joy. Hitherto we have merely heard of His rising; but in the narratives of His appearances we must contemplate Himself, and even this first appearance which lies before us reveals to us as in a bright mirror the glory of the renewed life of the risen Saviour.

The *first disciple privileged to see Him*, shows us evidently that His loving heart is nowise changed. Supposing it had been left to us to guess what human eye on earth should earliest see the first-fruit from the dead, who would have thought by preference on Mary Magdalene? Yet He stoops before all others to this sorrowing one, who at an earlier period had fallen so deeply into sin. No soul on earth has need more pressing than she for consolation, as she stands there alone weeping by the forsaken tomb; and so entirely absorbed is she in her great loss, that even an angel's voice is not enough to check the torrent of her tears. Here the best servant was not sufficient; the Master must Himself appear, and already *the first question that He asked* made her feel how He perceived the first necessity of her glowing heart. It is not alone the inquiry of matchless sympathy: 'Why weepest thou?' but also the foreseeing love: 'Whom seekest thou?' by which at once the anticipation of something great and glorious is awakened.

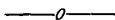
'*What seek ye?*' had been the first question of His first life (John i. 38), but here He shows at once that He knows right well that this mourner seeks nothing else

than One, and His double question becomes at the same time a prophecy of the tendency of His glorified life above. Therefore He arose to dry the bitter tears of all who weep by the grave of their lost happiness; therefore He comes ever in silence to each heart desirous of salvation, in order to seek all who are destitute of peace without Him, and to give them rest. 'Why weep ye? whom seek ye?' may also be asked of us at this glorious feast, as though the loving eyes of the Redeemer met us personally, and sought to penetrate the wayward heart. Ah, that we might be able as frankly and uprightly as Mary to declare that Jesus and He only is all we seek!

In truth, was not the *first joy He bestowed* the foretaste of what He ever gives, when, after painful search, we can at last exclaim,—Found? 'Mary—Rabboni;' no human speech can e'er express the tone and feeling with which both words are spoken: we perceive that thus Jesus alone can gladden, but we add immediately: Thus He gladdens still, whene'er His hour is come to change repentance into joy. Still the Good Shepherd knows His sheep, and calls them all by name (John x. 3), and out of countless thankful hearts yet sounds, once for the first and never for the last time, the grateful Rabboni. It may be frequently, indeed, as here, this happy contemplation lasts but a moment; but after such moments the feet proceed with renewed vigour on the way of new obedience, and the *first charge which He gave*, the risen Lord repeats still at this feast to every one who loves and serves Him.

'Go hence and tell my brethren;' nay, here there is no useless indulgence in dreams of bliss: no sluggish experience which not merely desires to 'touch' Him, but to grasp Him with both hands; but a life of real self-denying, ministering love: behold the task of all who really know Christ 'in the power of His resurrec-

tion.' Not she who wept most bitterly by the grave, but she who went with promptest obedience at His hint, is the best disciple of the Lord; the most faithful, because He gladdens and consoles us, in order that He may make us fellow-workers with Him for the joy and rejoicing of others. 'Mary Magdalene departed thence.' Alas! why cannot we follow her with our gaze, without a moment later being constrained to cast down our eyes ashamed? Why did she feel so much more for the Lord she fancied dead, than we do for the living? Why was it so unbearable to her to lose Him, so blessed to recover Him? Can it be because we are not bound to Jesus with such strong cords of grateful love as she, out of whom He had cast seven devils? Lord, Thou knowest it: oh, banish from us whatever separates us from Thee! Teach us to mourn, especially, if it so be that our heart is a grave wherein Thou art not! Reveal, moreover, Thyself also to us in the riches of Thy compassionate love; and since Thou hast ascended to Thy Father and our Father, to Thy God and our God, do Thou still think on us, and let the Rabboni of faith and love continually sound louder in our hearts and from our lips!



EIGHTH APRIL.

'And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them.'—
MATT. xxviii. 9.

THE appearance of the risen Lord to the women, only told us by Matthew, and quite distinct from that to the weeping Mary Magdalene, is relatively a small gem in the costly pearl chaplet of resurrection manifestations, but not the less to our thinking of great significance. Very probably occurring early on the first Easter morning, shortly after His appearance to Mary,

it shows us as in a clear mirror the image of the salutation which the risen Saviour *prepares* for each of His followers, but also on the other side the *homage* which He *requires* from each of these. Strange! the saying of the angel had referred them to Galilee, and thus had given them a prospect of beholding their risen Master at a later period; and already in Jerusalem that same morning they find prepared for them by Himself the gladdest of surprises. Whilst they then hasten, as though winged, to be the first to proclaim this glad tidings of Easter there,—nay, it is no dream,—there approaches them the well-known form, there sounds the voice that thrills the deepest chords within their souls: then by a beam of the Easter sun all fear at once is banished, and the ‘great joy’ made perfect. What *anticipating* love, which waits not to be sought for in Galilee, but itself goes forth to meet these sorrowing ones, and, unasked for, lets itself be found close to the holy sepulchre! What *forbearing* love, which thus exclaims ‘All hail’ to these much favoured ones, but without a shadow of reproach on account of their hardness of heart to believe His word, recalled to their memories by the angel! What *all-fulfilling* love, which through this unexpected appearance changed doubt to certainty, disquiet into rapture, and with its friendly ‘Fear not’ dispersed all clouds which still might hide the day, and lifted away the bar before the feet, which hastened on the path of new obedience! Who must not here repeat, ‘It is the Lord’? but who must not also bear witness, Jesus Christ ever the same? Yea, wherever upright hearts look with desire to Him, seeking that which not even angels can bestow, there He is ever ready to take the initiative. He does not ask what His disciples merit, but only what they need; and all He has to say to their hearts begins yet with the old injunction, which still is ever new, ‘Fear not.’ Fear not for your guilt, for it is perfectly atoned

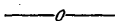
for through Him who has arisen from the dead for your justification, and now lives for ever to make intercession for you. Fear not for your cross, because He treads before you, who preceded you through suffering to glory. Fear not for your task, though it be heavy for your weakness, for Jesus lives in order in weakness to perfect His inexhaustible strength. Fear not the grave, for even the face of death becomes transfigured through the Prince of life. Angels of consolation shall appear to you close to the sombre tomb, and the living Lord holds the keys of death in His hands once pierced for you. Oh, glorious Easter gospel, speak to each down-cast heart regarding this joy which none can take away! Hymn of resurrection, whisper along the tombstones which we can only gaze at, but cannot roll away! And glorious Easter Sovereign, as we along our toilworn path speed onwards in the falling twilight, show Thyself to us in the spirit, and let us not go without hearing in our inmost souls Thy voice of peace!

But can we pray thus from the heart, without at the same time thinking what is the *homage* which the risen Lord still constantly requires from each of His people? Before all things, the homage of *deep adoration*. 'And they held Him by the feet and worshipped Him.' They render it boldly, reverentially, unanimously, and the arisen Master accepts it with unconditional approval. Ah! how much more gladness a stronger faith would bring us now, since just in measure of our unbelief we lack perfect acquaintance with Him! Verily, the best place is still at Jesus' feet, not merely for the penitent, but for the redeemed also!

But it must be, moreover, the homage of *ready devotion*. 'Go, tell my brethren that they go into Galilee.' Let us reckon up how often already, this first Easter morning, the injunction and the example have been given us to become fellow-workers in promoting the enjoyment of

others, and let us then ourselves determine, if anything can excuse our slowness in this work of love.

And lastly, the homage of *calm expectation*. 'There shall they see me in Galilee.' *Where* specially, *how*, *when*, is withheld; even when the Easter morn has dawned, faith and hope yet remain the watchwords; but enough: after the good the better still remains to be looked for. All that the Lord gives to enjoy in Jerusalem takes nought away from that which He reserves in Galilee. Your fairest Easter joys lie not behind, but in the future. Christians, rejoice in hope!



NINTH APRIL.

'The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.'—LUKE xxiv. 34.

I LIST the tidings, but faith faileth me,'—thus the greatest poet of Germany causes his Faust to exclaim in despair, after he has just heard the Easter bells, which had awakened the memory of the beautiful hymns of his long departed youth. 'I list the tidings, but faith faileth me:' how many of the children of the present age might in sad accents utter the same sentiments, when they hear the hymn of triumph of the Christian Church sound to the glory of the Conqueror of death and the grave! Alas! also in this our age shows itself old, in that it has exchanged the joyful faith of earlier times for doubt and mistrust; and it is only known above how many there are, who yet call themselves Christians, whose celebration of this festival might be summed up in the lamentation of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, 'but Him they saw not.' Yet the Church of Christ continues from age to age, in contrast to this doubt, to re-echo the joy of the first Easter, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.' Might

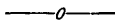
not this exclamation of joy be termed, in a certain sense, the most ancient Easter hymn of the Church, 'a symphony which God had made,' as it has been designated by a man of poetic feeling? It is unquestionable that the *certainty* as well as the *glory* of the resurrection is here most powerfully impressed upon the listening ear. Yea, 'The Lord is risen indeed;' it seems as though we had before our eyes the apostle who here comes forward as the witness of this incontestable miracle. Simon, the upright friend, the fallen disciple, the called apostle, first sunk in deepest agony of soul, now revived to a living hope, through the resurrection of the Lord from the dead; he is here, in truth, no less reliable a witness than afterwards John and Paul become. The eleven and they that were with them, who first raised this sound of jubilee, could not possibly have done so, unless they who at first were unbelieving had not felt in themselves a transition to undoubting certainty, which nothing but the fact itself can explain; he who asserts that the belief in the resurrection was the result of excited imagination, might as well maintain that hunger can produce bread, or the longing of the eye for the sunlight arrest its course in the heavens. And if we turn next our eyes on the Saviour Himself, whose appearance drew forth this song of praise, here too we have a striking characteristic of the ample riches of His heart. Mark well: the Lord appears to the *fallen* Simon, and shows Himself thus also in His second life the Saviour of sinners. He appears to Simon, *first* of all the apostles; Thomas, James, even John can wait, but this pitiable one needs first of all the soul's Physician. Lastly, He appears to Simon *in solitude*, but not when he was unprepared. That consoling 'tell Peter' has already reached him through the report of the women; now, perhaps, he wanders alone, musing on the message, and just here is sought and found of Jesus, vouchsafed the honour of a separate

appearance ; but what further took place between the Master and the disciple the angels alone witnessed. How do we here again perceive the Saviour ! And if agreement may really be termed the evidence of truth, how does such a harmony between Christ's first and second life remove all grounds for the assumption that this page of gospel history is but a 'cunningly devised fable' !

Nay, assuredly here or nowhere is truth ; and it cannot astonish us that this most ancient Easter hymn in the course of centuries has been repeated in accents numberless, and yet ever sounds forth, never, no, never to cease. But here, in this appearance to Simon, to which Paul also alludes in a single word (1 Cor. xv. 5), the glory of the Prince of life shines forth in heightened splendour. Jesus is risen ! Thus He is really the faithful and true Witness, the first-fruits of them that slept, the Sovereign of the kings of the earth. Jesus hath been seen of Simon ; thus He is then really the Chief Shepherd of the sheep, who hath brought back with Him from the dead the faithful shepherd heart. Yea, verily, He is the *Lord* in all the force of the word ; the Lord of each one of His followers, of His whole Church, of heaven and earth together.

How is it possible that His claim to this title of honour should be contested, and doubt be cast upon the truth of His resurrection ? Can it be explained from the conjunction of the two divisions of the strophe, 'arisen, *and* seen of Simon' ? By the Simons was the risen Saviour seen, not by the Judases, and still less by an Annas and a Caiaphas. But the humble heart of Simon, earnestly desirous of salvation, is it not lacking to many ? and the capacity for faith, which we discover in the disciples going to Emmaus, are there not too many who cannot claim it ? We judge not ; but we pray : Lord, increase among us and outside of us the number of

Simons ; reveal Thyself to such, and teach them in forgiving love to trace Thy holy footsteps !



TENTH APRIL.

‘And they told what things were done in the way, and how He was known of them in the breaking of bread.’—LUKE xxiv. 35.

IF already the first Easter salutation of the eleven and they who were with them announce the certainty and the glory of the Saviour’s resurrection, these both shine strikingly forth also in the narrative of the meeting of the disciples with the Lord on the road to Emmaus. These visitors of Emmaus, to whom are they not in a certain sense friends of early youth ? and yet again, on the other side, to what Christian do they not become more familiar and more dear as years advance, as the entreaty, ‘Abide with us, for it is toward evening,’ sounds in our hearts more loudly ? Yes, the Lord is risen *indeed* ; we repeat this as often as we lend a listening ear to Cleophas and his companion, because either Luke’s narrative must be genuine, or such an invention would belong rather to the tribunal of a court of justice than to that of criticism. There is no other choice than either to receive this relation as that of a history deserving of all credit, or as a tissue of falsehoods, which is irreconcilable with the acknowledged moral character of the author. If we direct our eyes to the mode of thought, the language, the whole bearing of both the travellers, and then on the word and mode of acting of the Redeemer, the internal evidences of truth are multiplied, so that the Lord of life appears to meet us in almost every incident. ‘After that He appeared in *another* form unto two of them, as they walked and went into the country,’ so we read in Mark (xvi. 12) ; but, in

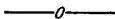
truth, that glance would be both dull and superficial, if in this other form it did not recognise immediately the self-same Lord, the first-fruits of them that slept, the best Guide of His people on the way of life. Yea, all these things form one harmonious history, that they may bring before our eyes a striking picture of what life would be without the living Christ, but through Him what it may be; nay, but moreover, what it must be if it be for Him.

Life *without* Christ, what is it, but a long history of disappointment, disquietude, and fear, as that of which in the narrative and confession of Cleophas and his companion a single page reveals? Alas! what treasures of light and strength, of hope and consolation, would for suffering mankind, would for the Christian, sink into the grave if unbelief were right; and thenceforth it might be deemed conclusive, that the sealed tomb in Joseph's garden was not opened on the third morning! How unsatisfying would the declaration of the gospel be, if the preacher, almost as Peter spoke of David (Acts ii. 29), were forced to say of Jesus: 'Let me freely speak unto you of this rabbi Jesus, the son of Joseph, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day!' How much they lose, who, though at an earlier period of life they may have thought more highly of this Jesus, yet now before their clouded vision His marvellous life-history ends with His solemn burial!

But, God be praised, none of us need any longer remain so miserable; and the experience of the travellers to Emmaus has once for all declared to us what life *through* Christ may become, and how much every heart desirous of salvation may ever find in the risen Saviour. Does He not still seek with equal pity the straying sheep? and was ever any backsliding too far to meet His question of compassion, 'Why are ye sorrowful?'

Does He not now hear with the same yearning tenderness the outpouring of the stream of our complaints, as on the first day of His rising? Does He not still enlighten through His word and Spirit the ignorant and slow of heart? and does He not rebuke in secret the wandering which is fatal to our soul's peace? Assuredly He still tries the faith, as on the day when to the journeyers to Emmaus 'He made as though He would have gone farther;' but the entreaty, 'Abide with us,' finds still as kind assent as it did then: and when His hour is come, He reveals Himself to the eyes of our spirit in the breaking of the tear-steeped bread of trial, as the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, who lives to all eternity. Ah, if only our eyes were opened that we might know Him, and so incessantly gaze on Him, that He might nevermore go from our sight!

It becomes then also evident to us what the life *for* Him in His service and to His glory must be in conformity to that of these first disciples. The fervent heart, the unclosed eye, the ready feet of these faithful pilgrims, who yet late in the evening returned to the city, in order that their brethren might share their joy—these must not be wanting in any one who really can be said to have risen with Christ to new life. Lord, lead Thou us on this way, and fulfil in us the word of promise: 'If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.'



ELEVENTH APRIL.

'Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.'—JOHN XX. 20.

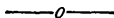
YET once again turn we in thought back to that day, never to be forgotten, when Christ arose; but is it not as though the Easter sun shone brighter in the

evening than in the morning, and as if the last appearance of our risen Lord surpassed in glory those that went before it? But we perceive at once, upon reflection, all the other appearances of this day were at the same time preparations for this one: none of the rest embraced so wide a circle: none in its results was more significant to the whole kingdom of God. On the evening of the first day of Easter the apostolic commission was delivered; and so much tranquil glory is spread over the arisen Saviour, that still the voice of grateful memory exclaims: 'We have seen the Lord.' The evening appearance—if a title were placed above the picture of this inspired page—might run thus: The Prince of peace amidst His disquieted subjects. These earliest friends of Jesus are in truth disquieted, for during the last few hours they have been so surprised and tossed about by rumours and reports, that now they scarcely know what they must think and hope. Many are at once persuaded, but others are disposed to doubt: along with fear of the Jews come also anxiety and internal discord: without is stillness and the darkness of night: at once a well-known voice sounds in their ears, and thrills their hearts within their deepest chords. Even in His outward gait the risen Lord shows kingly majesty: closed doors bar not His entrance: He stands there in the midst, like an appearance from a higher sphere, but soon makes evident to them His infallible reality. His salutation of peace is royal, and from such lips significant; it is presently repeated in a manner which must put to flight the last shadow of a doubt. He who thus calls down on them the blessing of peace possesses it Himself unquestionably, and bestows it on the disquieted soul; nay, He Himself rests not till in compassionate love He has stooped to the low point of view of those who, at sight of the Lord of life, terrified and affrighted, supposed that they had seen a spirit.

Involuntarily, at the look of heavenly calm contrasted with such childish fear, we are reminded of more than one occasion of a similar kind in the earlier life of Jesus ; and we need not His declaration, ' It is I myself,' to recognise in Him no less than the risen Prince of peace, the Sovereign of God's kingdom. This He at once confirms by renewing to His apostles the mission to preach the gospel of peace throughout the world, as special messengers from Him, even as He was the chief ambassador of the Father. Then, too, before He leaves them, He bestows on them the highest of gifts, of which, moreover, no creature can dispose, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the first-fruits being communicated to them through His inspiring breath. Thus He transforms doubt into certainty, discord into peace, sorrow into joy, weakness into strength, fear into hope. Whom does it astonish, that all the faces of those present begin to shine as with reflection from a higher world : that gladness at last forces for itself an entrance into hearts which at first could not, and afterwards dared not, believe : that forthwith all tongues could no more weary of exclaiming : ' We have seen the Lord' ? Almost might men wish for themselves such grief as that of these first followers of the Lord, if indeed a joy like theirs upon this blessed evening could thus be purchased. In the morning there may have been weeping among them, in the evening there was loud triumph !

But does this joy need to remain untasted until the close of the present life ; or is it still to-day attainable, and in the future to be expected in even richer measure ? As though this evening's salutation of peace were null and void, and the Lord had once more left His children orphans ! Ye know better, friends of Jesus, in whom, as under His quickening breath, the life of the spirit is awakened, and who through faith have seen in the marks of His wounds the pledge of your restored peace

with God. Ye comprehend even better than the disciples then could do, that the living Christ not only gives us peace and restores it to us, but is Himself our peace; and to the listening ear sounds ever forth His greeting across the tempest-tossed sea of our hearts, and of the ever-troubled world. Show that ye know it: let your words be as the echo of peace: procure, restore, preserve in the power of the Holy Ghost the peace of God wherever possible, and look not for peace either for yourselves or for all those who struggle and suffer round you, but from the living Saviour. Oh, ye who say ye know Him, how is it possible to be so abundant in disquiet, so poor in peace? 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost!' (Rom. xv. 12.)



TWELFTH APRIL.

'If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.'—

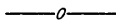
I COR. xv. 17.

DURING successive days we have anew rejoiced in spirit by the Saviour's empty sepulchre, and yet frequently shall our thoughts turn thitherwards throughout these memorable forty days. But is the matter then well worthy to be held in memory? and can they possibly be right, who assert that the miracle of Easter, however stamped and certified by history, is nevertheless of subordinate significance for our belief and life? The proposition is astounding; but, moreover, assuredly ages ago contradicted by Paul, for instance in the passage that forms our text, and in what precedes it (ver. 14): 'If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.' That Paul, in speaking of the Lord's resurrection from the dead on the third

day after His burial, had no other meaning than His bodily rising, can scarcely be seriously contradicted ; the contrary can only be maintained by such as seek to discover at any cost an excuse for doubt or denial even in the gospel of the Scriptures itself. Without this miracle, attested through him by many witnesses, the apostle declares both his preaching and belief to be '*vain,*' without ground and without fruit ; and he affirms that the Christian converts are yet '*in their sins,*' subject to punishment, and not really justified before God. And is there indeed much necessary in order to confirm the justice of this inference to our judgment as Christians? But who is Jesus, if His sepulchre remains closed, and He only lives in spirit, and in no other manner than all the God-fearing dead? In no case the only Son of God, in the scriptural sense of the word ; but a man of like passions as we, incapable even as the least of His brethren to subdue the united power of sin and death. Even less the Faithful and True Witness ; because, if His unequivocal predictions concerning His resurrection have remained absolutely unfulfilled, there is no reason why men should thenceforth give unconditional credence to His word. Least of all the absolutely sinless One ; because, having died and remained in death, He may indeed on the cross have borne the penalty of our sins, but cannot possibly have atoned for them. But thus, neither is He the Redeemer, the Saviour of those lost but for Him ; and the apostles, who represent Him as such on every page of their writings, set out from a totally unjust statement, and thus recommend the opposite theory. With respect to the miracle of the resurrection, declared by them more loudly than ought else, they deserve, whether as deceivers or deceived, to bear no better name than that of false witnesses. Those who in belief of this testimony of theirs have laid down their dying heads in peace, have departed in lamentable error ;

and those who, with the hymn upon their lips, 'Jesus lives, and we with Him,' bravely face eternity, are indeed the simplest of the simple. Henceforward they who still desire to remain Christians are to be pitied in comparison with those who recklessly break with Christianity, whilst they declare emancipation from the flesh to be the highest wisdom, and the hope of a blessed reunion—yet wherefore proceed further? The most renowned apostle of the unbelief of our age (Strauss) has undisguisedly avowed that absolutely nothing in the words of the apostle can bear another meaning; that with this single point the Christianity of past ages falls, and that he and those that think with him can no longer bear the name of Christians. Praiseworthy honesty! Why is it not followed by so many, who on this point are perfectly at one with the denials which unbelief gives to Scripture authority, and nevertheless—they must themselves know why—will in no case give up their place in the ranks of professing believers? Certain it is, that they who in this respect determine to say *no* in contradiction to the unanimous *yea* of evangelists and apostles do not properly belong to a church, which without the fact of the resurrection would have no existence, and through its avowal of that fact is separated from every other religion and scheme of the universe. If the Church in the forbearance of love suffers for a time in her bosom that which she will not drive forth but by spiritual means, it is only in the calm certainty that the current of opinions is temporary, but the fountain of truth and life which has its source in the shadow of the unsealed sepulchre of the Redeemer is absolutely inexhaustible. Yet all the more it rests on us to show that this stream has refreshed us, so that we, inwardly certain of the resurrection of Jesus, are no more in our sins, but with Him are risen to new life. No orthodox confession of a dogma concerning facts can make the desired impression on unbelievers and waverers,

but only the revelation in the walk and behaviour that we really 'know Christ in the power of His resurrection.' What profits it though we cause the world to *hear* the truth even to satiety, if we never let them *see* it! O Lord, grant that we, more than we have ever been before, like Thine apostles (Acts i. 22), may be *witnesses* of Thy resurrection, so powerful and persuasive, that those who will not confess and worship with us may at least be constrained to *silence!*



THIRTEENTH APRIL.

'And be not faithless, but believing.'—JOHN xx. 27.

IS it not most probably this exclamation of the Lord which Thomas has to thank for the epithet so familiar to us all of 'unbelieving Thomas'? Certainly the name was not undeserved by him; but as certainly may his surname Didymus, according to its original meaning of twin brother, be applied not merely to an individual, but to countless numbers in all times and places, and specially in the present day. Even as fresh evidence of the truth of the Lord's resurrection, there is importance in this appearance to a man, of whom a Father of the Church justly testified: 'He doubted, in order that we should not doubt.' But especially as an example of the power of unbelief, even in well-intentioned friends of the Lord, it deserves the highest attention; for though the history of the Church actually speaks of a distinct sect of Thomas-Christians living in the far East, we need not travel so far in order to find great multitudes of genuine Thomas-Christians.

Their obvious type stands before us in the apostle, who sets more value on the evidence of his own ten

fingers than on the unanimous declaration of the ten apostles. There are critical natures which cannot resolve on the bold step of believing; honest doubters, for whom the light cannot rise, because they themselves always stand in the way; obstinate opponents, who bring forward capricious objections, without the fulfilment of which they refuse to surrender; unhappy sufferers, like Thomas, to whom inward and actual peace are wanting; but, moreover, great transgressors like him, who incessantly place their own *nay* in opposition to the *yea* of the truth.

What would become of such wavering and doubting hearts if the Lord did not Himself come to them? But this may be the great *consolation* of all Thomas-Christians: the risen Saviour does not pass by without vouchsafing His salutation of peace even to such struggling minds as his. He comes in various ways, when the doors are shut and hearts are open, and shows soon that He has been witness to the struggle. Nay, He reveals Himself still as the infallible and compassionate physician for sinking Thomas-natures, and stoops to the depths in order to raise them in the fellowship of His imperturbable peace. What to a Caiaphas would most undoubtedly have been refused, was vouchsafed to honest Thomas, although apparently this last in his ecstasy neglected to use the permission granted; and when the good Master perceives that the disciple is on the downward track which must lead from unbelief to denial in a constantly more guilty sense, He cries aloud the warning: 'Be not faithless, but believing;' and this not merely in a single point, but in all the power of the word.

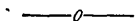
But this much is evident from the Scripture: it is then at all times the sacred *duty* of doubting friends of Jesus to yield without hesitation, to avow without timidity, to believe without seeing. Or should

not Thomas for ever have lost the most blessed hour of his life, if he, when so amazingly privileged through Jesus, had now moved two steps backward in place of one forward? 'My Lord and my God!'—by this exclamation he atones for the sin and folly of his former words; the homage which unconditionally is due to the Lord, He accepts without reserve; yet it is only, indeed, well pleasing to Him when the emphasis is laid upon the *my* of faith, and thus the avowal is the expression, not of intellectual conviction only, but of inward life experience.

Does it often cost hard struggle to come to the conviction, and to persevere in it, that the mighty saying, 'Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed,' was meant for us also. This is a heavy claim, no doubt, but not too heavy, if we at last have learnt to doubt the justice of our doubt, and truly as sinners to kneel before the feet pierced through for our salvation. Oh, do this, twin brother of Thomas, and yield thyself honourably vanquished, since truth is too strong for thee! Forsake not the assembly of the brethren, although thou canst not share their faith; the Lord's salutation of peace is always first heard in fellowship, in order afterwards to be repeated in private, and to become better understood. Does the Lord delay to come?—abide His hour; these seven days, so painful to Thomas, at a later period are seen to have been a blessed season of transition and of preparation. And ye who through God's grace are cured of this plague, or have been kept from it, draw ye the weak by love's attraction, as the other apostles did not drive Thomas from their upper chamber as a heretic, but treated him as a sick brother. Be merely witnesses, and show that ye have seen the Lord: the special conviction is not your work, but His; He will come when His hour is come, that He may speak the mighty word which restores peace between brethren

after discord, and to bestow on you after the loyal battle of faith the crown of victory—

‘ Let no one take my crown, O Lord!
Or—if too much this be—
Say only, faith has failed in word,
Yet Thou hast loved me.’—TER HAAR.



FOURTEENTH APRIL.

‘ God, who quickeneth the dead.’—ROM. iv. 17.

AS certainly as the boldest and most magnificent descriptions of the glory and majesty of God are to be found in the Old Testament, so, undeniably, also in the New a single trait is frequently to be met with containing food for infinite thought in regard to the Most High. As an instance of this may be cited the pregnant saying of Paul, in which he speaks of a God ‘ who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not, as though they were.’ Does he here refer to the accomplishment of God’s promise to Abraham, of which mention is made in the context, or more generally to the creation of all things out of nothing? However this may be, his words contain an earnest call to us, deserving of the closest attention.

Yea, verily, well may he instance this, which is to men impossible, as the striking revelation of the majesty of the Infinite, that He, and He alone, is He ‘ who quickeneth the dead.’ Already the voices of creation on every return of the season of spring bear loud testimony to this truth. How does life again surround us, each day more beautiful! whence, too, we may direct our steps up towards the region of the unseen! It streams forth to us from the vernal sunbeams; it displays itself before our eyes in every flower-bud, open but for a few days or

hours ; it whispers in mountain and forest, in valley and glade, in tones innumerable ;—but what are all these but drops from the inexhaustible fountain of life? Thus the eternal law of nature is nothing but the manifestation of His independent will ; and if creation in her winter sleep so lately seemed as dead, it is the voice of her Maker which from year to year awakes her thence with a thrill of renovated life and power.

What these voices declare, *the marvels of grace* give us to behold incessantly by the most glorious examples. It is God who quickeneth the dead, first of all the dead *heart* of the sinner, which, torn off from the root of life, can least procure for itself that which it most requires. ‘ You hath He quickened,’ says the apostle, ‘ who were dead in trespasses and sins.’ By His word and Spirit He not merely awakes the slumbering life, but also anew creates it where it was lost in the heart estranged from Him, but yet originally formed in His image ; and where but recently only a desert could be seen, a new world is born. In the visible *Church*, so often lamentably dead and despised, He ever and anon causes fresh streams of life to flow ; and every new instance of awakening, of which the history of earlier or later times informs us, is the continued evidence that His arm is not shortened. Nay, even into the *world* in its mortal sickness and misery He brings life everywhere, when on the mountains He permits the feet of them that publish peace to appear, and causes the light of truth and grace to shine on them who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. Life through Him established and preserved, penetrates and gradually conquers death in all its forms ; and already in this lower world it may be seen indubitably, that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

And yet on earth, even the highest is but the pledge and presage of something greater ; and first in the *resur-*

rection this great declaration of Paul comes to its full accomplishment. Death still reigns here below, although for the Christian his terror is vanquished; we expect, however, the arrival of the hour in which the song of triumph, 'Death is swallowed up in victory,' shall no more lack one note. Sin's last word is death, but the last word of God Almighty is life; and what matters it though the eye of sense at times can see nought else but dissolution and decay? Also the things of the future, which as yet are not, He calls as though they were; or rather, they exist already in rudiment, even as the future corn plant is in the dying grain. This earth is passing away with all that is subject to death, but the great Easter morn is coming, of which at once the Hallelujah and Amen shall be this word, that God, and God alone, is He who quickeneth the dead.

Yet even here, how deeply must we at this thought bow before Him who alone is great, and the eternal source of all true life within! Life, alas! we may destroy it, lose it betimes, humbly pray for it, thankfully accept it; but call it into being in our own hearts, or give it to others, impossible! Yet how encouraging a faith like this: where our own impotence oppresses us, the power and faithfulness of God are manifested; and He who at last gave Sarah a child in her old age, can also for us in autumn and winter cause a new spring of life to bloom. If we have ourselves experienced the truth of the declaration, what comfort! He who gives life never reclaims His gift; and even temporary arrest of progress and languishing shall in His time be changed into increased development and participation of the Spirit. If we are truly in Him 'who is our life,' the word next to the last pertaining to our history may be *death*, the last shall be *life*.

FIFTEENTH APRIL.

‘Wherefore He saith, Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.’—EPH. v. 14.

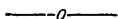
AMONG the greatest benefits in the kingdom of nature, bestowed alike on plant, on beast, and man, we justly reckon sleep. Sleep! how does it refresh the weary, how does it strengthen the weak, how does it often cause the unhappy to forget for many hours the sharpest pain! and how do we commiserate the sufferer, who is debarred night after night the privilege of sweet sleep! Nevertheless, sleep is the brother of death; though in the region of nature the friend of life, yet in the moral and spiritual world it is not so. On the contrary, what is there beneficial is here pernicious, and the question addressed in God’s word to the careless: ‘What meanest thou, O sleeper?’ is at once a humiliating and a menacing rebuke. ‘Wherefore He saith: Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.’ Is there foundation for the conjecture of the expositors, who here imagine that they discover a fragment of an ancient Christian hymn, raised in the assembly of believers, as in the face of the Jewish and the Gentile world, which yet lay sunk in the sleep of spiritual death? The measure of the original appears to plead for this interpretation, and the expression, ‘therefore says the song,’ to justify it. The idea is at least striking of such a hymn at such an early period in the second half of the first century, when this epistle was written, sounding through the homely upper chamber of the Church of the faithful, who, themselves already raised in and with Christ to new life, caused the resurrection hymn to be whispered above the graves of the old world. Yet who durst also in much

later times assert that such an awakening voice had not been heard by him, or being heard, had been sufficiently attended to and repeated? But this appears most obvious: the voice of this song is here at once a call from God, as appropriate, as urgent, but withal as promising, as when uttered eighteen centuries ago. 'Awake, thou that sleepest.' On looking round, how many we discover in the circle to whom this call addresses itself! and who, on self-examination, will affirm that he has quite escaped the fetters of the spirit of deep sleep? Here is a man in the sleep of absolute carelessness; there, a sinner in the sleep of stubborn insensibility; elsewhere, a Christian sunk in the sleep of inexcusable sluggishness; and it is only known above how many a face at the reproachful question, 'Could ye not watch with me one hour?' must stoop to earth ashamed. Those awakened either for the first time or afresh, God awakes through word and Spirit constantly; and He does it assuredly not without cause. Or are we not bought at a price inestimable, called to the most glorious destiny, and thereby exposed to a danger, which deep sleep menaces most of all? Yea, Awake, thus may all cry to us with trumpet voice: Awake, for Sin sleeps not, but incessantly winds her insidious snares around the limbs of sleepers: Time sleeps not, but inexorably leads on to the last resting-place: the Judge sleeps not, but stands ready to surprise thee, even as a thief in the night.

Awake, and *arise from the dead!* Ye must do so here, if life is really to become life, and death is not eternally to slay you. Ye can arise from death in the power and might of God, because in Christ He has already given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness (2 Pet. i. 3); and the spiritually dead, to whom now the voice of the Prince of life comes, though they be dead, yet *hear* (John v. 25). With yourselves it rests that the salvation, which God destines for you in Christ,

shall not be wholly lost. The word of resurrection which went forth from His lips has long since reached you: it needs and asks on your side merely obedience. The voice which claims it has at the same time in itself a life-awakening power, if ye at least kick not against the pricks, and if ye do not wilfully close eyes and ears. ‘*Christ shall give you light;*’ He who is the soul of all His people, the sun of the spiritual world, is the light for which your eyes are formed; the fountain of light, warmth, and fertility for all your life, internal and external. For he to whom in Christ a new day of life is begun, in comparison with which life without Him may be termed utter darkness, and who through God’s grace himself becomes light in the Lord, will also in his turn bring light to his brother, and approach now the couch of his companion crying aloud the word of life—Awake! Have we all not merely heard this word, but heard it and obeyed it; and if so, do we repeat it loud enough, where we meet sleeping eyes? Or is the answer rather: Let me sleep, rest is so sweet, the day is yet so long; when it is later, I will leave my couch? Thus may men speak by actions, and as loudly still even by neglect.

May the Searcher of hearts even from this day hear and *behold* a better answer from each of us!



SIXTEENTH APRIL.

‘If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.’—COL. iii. 1, 2.

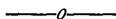
‘LET us also go, that we may die with Him!’ This exclamation of Thomas sounded solemnly in our ears at the commencement of the annual Passion Week; yet now, when we have afresh passed through the season

of Easter, not only outwardly but in spirit, must, with new zeal, the words of Paul become our watchword: 'If ye then be risen with Christ.' 'If,'—whether this has really taken place, may well be doubted of many, for whom the arousing voice, 'Awake, thou that sleepest,' has hitherto sounded in vain. Ah, how many, who for years have re-echoed the song of thanksgiving that Christ died for us, and rose again, and who have once more affirmed that they hate with a perfect hatred all that would rob them of these 'precious' truths, notwithstanding, have never yet attained to a rising *with* Christ! Here certainly self-examination is necessary, and self-deception extremely dangerous: unless the significant 'if' of Paul's declaration has absolutely nothing to do with us, we are clearly not in a position to follow out the rule of life laid down; it is not addressed to the unbelieving world, but solely to Christ's people. But *if* we have risen with Christ,—and this we have indeed, in spite of all our shortcomings, whenever through the bonds of a living faith and a fervent love we are bound to the dead and risen Lord,—then may, then can, then will we also give ear to this awakening, and seek not the things of earth, but those above, 'where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.' By this last addition, it is obvious, the admonition is not merely urged, but altogether justified. If the head is in heaven, it is impossible the limbs should seek and find life upon earth. Is He God, the only God?—surely it is impossible that His people should remain enslaved to the service of sin and the world; it must, and will be, doubtless, their earnest purpose to seek those things which are above. Who can declare in a few words satisfactorily all that is contained in this one article of the basis of Christian life? Certainly no indifference towards this present life, no cold contempt for the world, no little-minded distrust in regard to so much that is lovely and of good report, is

here preached to us by the apostle. The same pen which wrote down this admonition also wrote: 'For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving' (1 Tim. iv. 4). But still a sharp line of division is drawn between those who live through the Spirit, and those who walk after the flesh; and by this we are reminded of the words of the Saviour: 'Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world' (John xvii. 16).

The Christian *thinks* of heaven, and by choice directs his eye thitherward, even in the midst of the distractions and enjoyments of life, because there is the magnet which even in secret draws him. The Christian *works* for heaven, and would not be content although in the sweat of his brow, or without this, he had obtained for his whole life the food that perishes in the using. He esteems as loss all that divides him from fellowship with God; gain, on the other hand, whatever really makes him purer, riper, richer for the future, though obtained at cost of painful sacrifice. Above all, he *longs* for heaven; not with a morbid home sickness, but with that calm, subdued, active desire, which not merely looks forward, but, moreover, constantly hastens towards the city whose builder and maker is God. Thus thinking, working, desiring, he really *seeks* the things which are above; learns to know all the clearer, to enjoy the more abundantly; yea, already here to possess personally himself. He does this constantly, and the better in proportion as he knows more certainly, and seeks to show more faithfully, that he has really risen with Christ; and if it be impossible to accomplish this without much labour and struggle, he makes evident that he understands this other passage (ver. 5), '*Mortify* your members which are upon earth;' and he walks in the power of the Holy Spirit, as one who beholds his own resurrection in a spiritual sense as past, his ascension in prospect.

It is almost impossible to imagine a more happy frame of mind, a more just demand, a more blessed life, than that which is aimed at in this declaration of the apostle's; and yet, is there indeed a single one among us Christians whose heart does not condemn him at these words? In the Colosse of the first century there reigned—see the preceding chapter—a one-sided spirituality, which lost itself in idle dreams; but is there not in the community of the nineteenth century a strong materialistic tendency, and are we not unconsciously infected by the spirit of the age? Is it not as if in our demeanour, nay, even in our feeling, the invisible things were merely dreams, and the visible the only reality for which, in fine, the labour of living is worthy? Oh, how urgently we need this admonition, how frequently we forget it: 'Set your affection on things above'! Lord, write it ineffaceably on the tables of our heart, and never let it be to others a doubtful question, 'if we really have risen with Christ!'



SEVENTEENTH APRIL.

'For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.'—COL. iii. 3, 4.

YET once again we turn in thought back to the significant warning of Paul to the Colossian Christians, the commencement of which engaged our attention yesterday, and which deserves to be repeated and considered as a whole from year to year at the season of Easter. Recently we heard him on the marvellous *beginning of life*, and the pervading *direction of life*; now, on the hidden *glory of life*, and the joyful *hope of life* of the Christian, who with Christ has risen to new life. 'For ye are dead;' thus he refers to the first

resurrection, of course in a spiritual sense: '*And your life is hid with Christ in God.*' Your highest, real, blessed life he means to say, in which ye have part through fellowship with the risen Christ, appears in this life here below, but not in its full splendour. Equally, and along with the glorified Lord, it is now hidden: a life in God, because though seen outside of this, the region where it is rooted and grows up is an invisible world. This life is indeed yours; nay, but all that is implied in this expression is still hidden from others, partly even from yourself. In one word, it is not yet manifest who ye are, and what ye shall be. This is, in truth, a profound thought, even incomprehensible to the unbelieving world, who in our time of universal profession would not seldom be somewhat perplexed if compelled to answer the inquiry: Tell me the inner-life history of the hidden man of your heart. And yet what Christian does not perceive how high and holy is the truth expressed by the apostle, and in more recent times thus interpreted by a Christian poet (C. F. Richter):

'How shines the Christian's inner life,
 Though from without the storms be rife!
 That which by God for them is done,
 Save to themselves is known to none.
 They are in woe,
 In bliss also;
 Dead to the joys of sense and sin,
 They lead a blessed life within.'

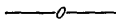
Yea verily, thus it is; it cannot, it must not be otherwise; and on this account we are not astonished that, in general, what is best in the Christian is least of all perceived. The world knows us not, writes John, because it knew Him not. Yet there remains no doubt that these clouds too shall be dispersed, when once the sun arises in full splendour. '*When Christ, who is our life, shall appear,*' writes the apostle, 'then shall ye also appear with

Him in glory.' 'He who is our life;' here is again one of those pithy sayings, which inevitably lose by every paraphrase. Put in place of this: 'He who is the source, the power, the stay, the hope of our life;' ye have indeed expressed something of it, but not nearly the whole. Not His word alone, not the Spirit alone; Christ Himself is that life, that hitherto hidden life of His people, and He shall yet be more fully revealed than ever before. Once at the close of time shall He shine forth in royal brilliance, and then, not sooner, shall His people with and in Him be manifested in all the glory of their indwelling spiritual life. Then once more, not sooner, shall it be revealed what these misjudged and despised Christians really were: along with their triumphant Head, they shall appear out of obscurity as His living members: the number of the redeemed is complete, and shines forth before the eyes of men and angels. Now it is seen what was indeed the life of Paul; the martyr's crown is changed for Stephen into a diadem of light; and from the threads which Tabitha spun to make clothes for the poor, is woven for her a festal robe of dazzling brightness. How many of Christ's followers whom we knew here, or—did not know, shall then appear with hearts full of faith and love; yet their Christian garb was before invisible, their form deformed with surroundings which ever hampered and obscured them; here below the costliest spikenard is not always preserved within a box of alabaster! But now, behold, the harmony is restored between the inner and outer life, between the essence and the form. The glory of Christ not merely irradiates His people, but in their turn they too shine forth, and in every pearl of His crown is mirrored back the lustre of the King. Oh, if in moments of ecstatic feeling the lively representation of that prospect can charm us, what shall it be when the home-sickness of God's children shall be fully satisfied, and this reality

shall have become eternal! Blessed are they who go forward to meet it with the hymn of a recently deceased poet in their heart :

‘ With Christ my life is hid with God ;
 Oh, idle worldly strife! Vain earthly joy!
 Mine eye and heart are raised where my sighs tend—
 To Christ, my life that hidden is with God,
 My love, my life, my wishes that employ,
 My aim, my strife, yet of my sins the rod.
 I gave Him all ; now henceforth here I send
 All my desire to Christ, my life in God.’

—A. D. A. V. D. HOEVEN, JUN.



EIGHTEENTH APRIL.

‘ Jesus Christ, which is our hope.’—I TIM. i. 1.

H OPE is an anchor of the soul! Among all the emblems of Scripture, is there one more beautiful or more just than this? A ship without anchor, a prey to the billows and the breakers, threatened on all sides by rocks and reefs ; behold in this a soul without true hope! Indeed, the proverb, ‘ Hope gives life,’ is every day verified by innumerable examples ; yea, even when the sun of life sinks in the horizon, Hope still holds forth her torch in the mists of death and the grave ; and assuredly the greatest poet of the Middle Ages could have engraved no more striking inscription on the place of eternal punishment than the famous, ‘ Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.’ Yet where is the hope which does not sooner or later disappoint man ; and where the sinner who does not sink despairing, when he casts his eye on his transgressions increased unto the heavens? Either it is not, or it is that on which the Christian fixes his eye, whene’er he boasts in Jesus Christ, who is our hope.

‘Who is our hope?’ Here again is one of those pointed and sententious expressions, in which we recognise Paul, and which in a striking manner brings out who and what Christ was, both for the apostle’s inner consciousness and for his daily renewed experience of life. Again, paraphrase these words, and you at the same time weaken them; contradict them, and the vaunt of Christian faith dies on your lips. It is noteworthy that Paul speaks of faith in Christ as his own hope, and that of his beloved disciple, in an epistle written towards the close of his career. When the evening falls, the stars begin to show themselves to the eye with heightened brilliancy. Assuredly a declaration like this would have been insensate folly if Christ had stood no higher in his estimation than now He does in this age of unbelief; but as certainly the reflection and experience of every Christian sets a further seal on Paul’s expression.

Yea, verily, Christ is Himself the *object* of His people’s hope. This hope is directed—do we need to be reminded of this?—not to anything in themselves, or in the world around them; not even to God out of Christ, the Supreme Being or Providence in the general sense, but to Him in whom the marvellous promise, ‘Immanuel, God with us,’ is verified, and without whom no man cometh to the Father. He may be our hope, because He is more than all men and angels together, even God manifested in the flesh. He will be our hope, because He has voluntarily come forth as Friend, Brother, and Saviour of our fallen race. He must be our hope, otherwise all is lost with us: ‘Having no hope, and without God in the world.’

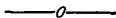
And further: Christ is the *foundation* of our hope; because all that preserves us from despair, and gives us courage again to raise our sinking heads, is found exclusively in Him and in His work. Take away His advent here, His word, His sufferings and death, His

resurrection and glory, and the whole fabric of our hope, however fair to the eye, will sink before the first tempest of adversity into a shapeless mass of ruins. It is He to whom God, according to the significant saying of another apostle (1 Pet. i. 21), gave honour and glory: 'That your faith and hope might be in God.'

In one word, Christ is the *life* of our hope: just as all who are without Him pine and die, so are we more firmly rooted and grounded in proportion as we cling to Him and increase in fellowship with Him. Therefore Paul speaks elsewhere (Col. i. 27) of 'Christ among us the hope of glory.' It is the spirit of Christ, which not merely awakes within us the true life of hope, but feeds and preserves it, and makes it ever more abundant. The plant must necessarily die as soon as it no longer absorbs the rays of this life-awakening sun. Indeed, Christ is not merely the worthy and all-sufficient, but, moreover, the only and eternal centre of all the hopes of His own people.

This simple truth, so indisputable and interesting in itself, should it not be especially worthy of remembrance in the present day? Yet certainly only a superficial glance is necessary in order to convince us that a well-grounded and joyful hope holds but a slight place in the hearts of numbers who call themselves Christians, and that the hidden life of many is a prey to mute despair, which like a cankerworm gnaws through its noblest portion. Beyond submission to the inevitable, a great part of this generation cannot attain; but if the decline in the life of hope of multitudes within the last twenty years could be expressed in ciphers, the sum would amount to millions. This is because the spirit of the age has broken with Christ, and in as far as it is religious at all, looks back from the standpoint of mere natural religion, which has no gospel of hope. He who has not the Son, has not the Father; and he who has not the

Father, on what shall he hope? Christ, or—despair? it is the great question of our age. May the Spirit of Truth Himself teach us to comprehend aright the only answer!



NINETEENTH APRIL.

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.'—1 PET. i. 3.

WHAT an inestimable treasure of joy and comfort must the Easter gospel have brought to this poor earth, since the apostle, out of the fulness of his heart, writing to the dispersed and heavily-trying Christians, after the first salutation of blessing at once bursts forth into rapturous praise of God, and scarcely can find words to vaunt the blessedness contained in personal fellowship with the living Christ! These words alone would have entitled Simon Peter to the name of the apostle of hope; and in this artless description we learn the experience of his inner life. Nay, without this he could have had no life when, racked by self-reproach, he mourned the death of the Master, and beheld his whole future enveloped in a dark cloud. The message of the angel: 'Tell Peter,' first rolled away from his heart the heavy tombstone; and when shortly afterwards the risen Saviour was seen also of Simon, it was as though for him the dawn of a sacred day had arisen. He was himself born from death to a new life,—a life of the most blessed hope; and this hope had its foundation in the fact of the revival to life of Christ. But does not this his privilege fall to the portion of all believers, who can boast that God has raised them up with Christ; and can any one seriously deny that just the great miracle of Easter is the sole but sufficient foundation of the

Christian's hope of life? Nay, we do not say too much when we assert that without the risen Christ no real living and well-grounded hope exists. Nature may show us the emblem of the resurrection; it affords even less security for a personal than a blessed continuance of life. Reason may plead the sweetest hope of the heart with keenest logic, her syllogisms are silenced by the sight of the tokens of dissolution already begun. Yea, although in this way we could obtain possibility and probability of an eternal destiny, we require infallible certainty; and this is given to the Christian faith in the great fact of Christ's resurrection more than in anything else. Is further evidence required than this, that wherever this miracle is not received, the hope of eternal life is also gradually choked, if not entirely blotted out! Nay, it is never-failing: the lovely flower puts forth its tender shoot beneath the shade of Jesus' empty sepulchre; it thrives under the beams of the Easter sun, but before the chill breath of doubt and misjudgment it droops its head, languishes, and fades. Only in fellowship with Him who has uttered this great saying, 'Because I live, ye shall live also,' does the Christian feel himself already on earth born to new life. Oh, what deep thanks are due by us to Supreme Wisdom, that He has given our most precious hope a firm foundation in a fact which can only be denied when men are *desirous* at all events to break with the gospel of the apostles; and how happy is he who, opposed to so many demands for signs of authenticity, can point to this exclamation of delighted astonishment at the communication of his living hope! 'Is hope then to rest ultimately upon this, that according to assertion, eighteen hundred years ago, a dead body arose from the tomb?' Nay, not on this alone, superficial questioner, who with unbounded arrogance wilt unfasten this one link in the chain of salvation from all those that go before and that follow it. But in

this indeed, that God's own Son, having become man, suffered deep humiliation; and having really died, personally (thus also bodily) broke the fetters of death, and thereby, in virtue of the law of entire unity of life between Him and His people, not only vanquished death for them, but also annihilated its very principle, so that it no longer deserves the name of death, but much rather that of the messenger of life. Or could it be possible that the head should be glorified, but the limbs destroyed; that the first-fruits should be gathered, but the harvest itself should never follow? Assuredly, Christians, we may here speak of insanity and unreasonableness, but not on our side, rather on that of unbelief and of misjudgment. Since we are one with Christ, we have in every respect death behind us, and we can fully enter into the feeling of the pious Melancthon, the anniversary of whose death (1560) recurs to-day, and who, on the question: 'If he wished anything,' with faint lips gave the answer, 'Nothing but heaven.'

'Nothing but heaven!' we will learn to repeat it not merely at death, but in life, whene'er the blessed mystery of this new birth of which the apostle speaks has been revealed to us. Let us write this deep on our own souls, and where we can, also on the souls of others: living hope is not the fruit of natural birth, but of regeneration. Regeneration is the fruit of personal communion with the living Saviour, who pours forth of His spirit and life into the hearts of all His followers. This fellowship is the means of attaining a measure of hope which cannot die in our hearts or on our lips even in the darkest hour, so long as we hold fast by this: 'I know in whom I have believed.'

TWENTIETH APRIL.

'To an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.'—I PET. i. 4.

IT was a saying worthy of remark which Moses once made to Hobab the son of Raguel: 'We are journeying towards the place of which the Lord hath spoken unto us; forasmuch as thou knowest that we are to encamp in the wilderness, thou mayest be unto us as eyes' (Num. x. 29-31). We too, believers, are in a certain sense sojourners in the wilderness, marching towards that better land, for which we need a faithful leader, in order that no mere vain mirage may perplex us, and withdraw our steps from the right path. Of whom can we better make choice for this office than of Peter, since he, after announcing the firm ground of his hope with well-assured confidence, speaks of its glorious result? The prospect to which he points is indeed fitted above every other to attune the heart to what is high and holy. He speaks of an inheritance for which the Christian not only may hope, but on which he may reckon unquestionably; of a special, personal possession in the land, of which the chart was never drawn by mortal hand, and yet already at its name and picture involuntarily this restless heart throbs quicker. Ever at the word 'in heaven,' the eye directs itself on high from out this land of gloomy shadow; and although we have learned long since not to regard it in a limited and local sense as being over our heads, we know at least equally well that it is nowhere to be found on this low earth. 'In the heavens;' it is where all light and love and life meet in one point before our dazzled eyes; we would desire to have if but a single glimpse behind that mystic curtain, broidered

with golden stars by God's own hand. And in this heaven an inheritance reserved for the Christian; what that implies ye cannot estimate, who know no other possessions than those whose value can be reckoned in current coin; but ye can speak of it, who feel yourselves in truth strangers on earth, where indeed all is lent to you, nothing is your own. An inheritance in heaven: even the idea has something in it at once marvellous and perplexing; but how much more powerfully does it still speak, when we compare this inheritance thus, as it were, in the hands of the apostle, with all that the earth offers to her children! Pause a moment, and lend an ear to the threefold promise in the text,—the favourite passage of the martyred reformer John Huss, and of so many who with him have already realized this hope.

Incorruptible: that indeed cannot be said of any inheritance on earth. All that has life grows to meet death; there is no bond so close as not to be gnawed through by the tooth of time, or unfastened by the hand of dissolution. *Incorruptible* stands written in golden letters only above the entrance to the city of inheritance. Eternal rest, eternal joy, eternal spring; add this one feature to the image of what you represent to yourself as high and glorious, and behold how it at once begins to shine in greater glory!

Incorruptible is the first quality of the treasure, and next *undefiled*. Here below—who knows it not?—there is no light without shade, no paradise without a serpent, no fruit without a worm, no warrior in the spiritual strife without wounds or defeat. But above, there is no tree of probation planted beside the tree of life; and at the feast of the redeemed, there is no single dish regarding which a 'touch not, taste not, handle not,' is to be feared. No injustice there has place; weeds grow not there; vice lays not there her snares. Ye may be

there harmless as doves, without requiring also the wisdom of the serpent; and from the 'Our Father' of prayer in heaven, the petition 'forgive us our sins' is for ever banished.

No single spot cleaves longer to the priestly robes with which God invests His heirs; and the inheritance itself may in the fullest sense be termed *imperishable*—that is, not merely eternally enduring, but at all times equally beautiful; and even in this respect affording a contrast to the earth. Place in your imagination the withered foliage of autumn beside the verdure of spring, and ye have the emblem of all things sublunary, nay, even of yourselves. But again, once yonder, the tree of life is never stripped of leaves; the foundations of the Father's house never give way; of the streams of salvation, the springs are never dry. What need of more? Certainly the three negatives of the text show us nothing positive; but even although we knew nothing further than that on high 'old things are passed away,' even this consideration should make us comprehend and assent to this declaration of a devout writer of former times: 'In this world our eyes are holden, so that they cannot see to heart's desire the glory of salvation; tears too oft blind them, and weariness closes them. The world is like a room full of smoke, hindering our vision. But when the Lord shall have redeemed us from all evil, we shall see with clearer eyes the riches of the inheritance of God, and its glorious brightness shall beam on us from every side. Lord, Thou hast given me much through faith, but Thou wilt give me more when I may come to Thee. Yea, amen; come, Lord, quickly!'

TWENTY-FIRST APRIL.

‘Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.’—1 PET. i. 5.

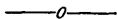
ALREADY have we learned from Peter to know the glad hope of faith in its firm foundation and its exceeding brilliancy. But what *guarantee*, we are almost irresistibly inclined to ask him, have we that this prospect also for us, as many as believe, shall undoubtedly pass into fulfilment? It is as if the apostle had foreseen this consideration, so much haste does he make to give us a firm, nay, a double pledge of the accomplishment of the expectation thus awakened. On the one side, *the inheritance is kept for the heirs*—‘reserved in heaven for you;’ so he goes on for the tranquillizing of the strangers, who perhaps had not all much reason to consider earthly treasure perfectly safe in the hands of others. In truth, in this world we may see a rich inheritance destined for us, without absolute certainty that after all we shall receive it. The person to whom our treasure is committed in trust for us may embezzle it, fire may consume paper of inestimable value, or a commercial crisis may swallow all. But heaven! See there a treasure-chamber, the entrance of which can be broken into by no robber; an inheritance which shall yet endure, when the final conflagration of the universe has destroyed the last copy of the Testament.

And yet more on the other side: *the heirs are kept for the inheritance*. Ye who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation: many of us have long known the sound of the apostle’s words, but has any one ever adequately appreciated the security of the guarantee here put into our hands? If we were exclusively or principally given over to our own powers, where is the believer who would experience henceforth

one tranquil hour! Alas! 'our strength is like a reed, our courage like a straw.' To-day we differ from what we were yesterday, to-morrow we shall perhaps scarcely in its poverty recognise the abundance of to-day. But, 'in the power of God,' who does not feel that that one word has altered the whole face of things? Not our salvation alone is in question, but God's power and faithfulness; we may thus rest secure. That the evangelical doctrine of the perseverance, or rather the preservation of saints has been sadly abused, is but too well known; and woe to the man who thus employs the highest consolation of faith as an opiate to his conscience! But the truth does not the less stand firm on God's side; and that the preservation here pointed to is in no degree arbitrary, as executed without our assent and in our despite, the apostle himself shows, when he expressly adds, 'through faith;' that faith which undoubtedly is a gift, but is not less a duty, an act—yea, the special, the one act of life of the upright disciple of the Lord. Now through this belief God preserves the heir of heaven for the good portion which awaits him; yea, faith itself is through Him incessantly preserved, strengthened, and increased. How, without this, would it be possible to reach the blessed end after which the soul longs so vehemently? There is, indeed, perhaps a spark of the life of God in your heart; but alas! earthly cares smother it, the ashes of impurity cover it, hostile feet trample on it, and thus it becomes in your inmost soul so cold, so dark, so almost hopeless. Yet God, according to a significant word of prophecy, 'maintains His work in the midst of the years;' He shelters the glowing spark within us with His mighty hand; He will not lead you out in His own time from the midst of death again to life, and redeem you out of six troubles, in order in the seventh to permit you to be lost. But thus it is evident the

Christian hope cannot fail, because every gift of God in the highest region of life is on His side at once a pledge and presage of something better and more beautiful. This life stands towards faith as the Scriptures of the Old Testament stand related to the New; and the certainty of our future is not guaranteed by any single virtue of ours, but by all God's virtues and His promises. We are driven about, indeed, on a tempestuous ocean, and it may seem that nothing but one thin plank divides from the abyss; but the plank is really impenetrable—not of rotting wood, but of iron; the compass points out the safe course, the rudder is the hand of God's almighty power; the shore is already seen afar in the morning dawn, and over there stands one like unto the Son of man. Be welcome, land of our inheritance! soon shall they arrive who behold thee! Ah, Christians! wherefore do we longer vex ourselves concerning this to-day already passing from before our eyes, and reckon not on the morrow which with each moment is drawing nearer? Rather sing we, though it be with tears:

‘Whatever thy need is,
Most certain then deem
Light comes out of darkness,
And peace from the stream.
If the Testament name thee
An heir through the cross,
There is none that can blame thee,
There can be no loss.’—LANGE.



TWENTY-SECOND APRIL.

‘For to this end Christ both died, and arose, and revived, that He might be the Lord both of the dead and living.’—ROM. xiv. 9.

LIFE and death. Could there be two words more opposed, nay, could two things be named which, on the first hearing, stand more sharply apart from one

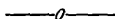
another? We speak of life, and think involuntarily of enjoyment, of action, of hopes, of all, in short, that charms and delights the heart; we speak of death, but the word alone is enough to make us turn pale with terror. To live and win, to die and lose, is for the most of people the same thing; and the children of the present age concur in the sentiment of the Preacher: 'A living dog is better than a dead lion' (Eccles. viii. 4). Yet this representation is more natural and human than perfectly correct, much less can it be termed spiritual and Christian. But between life and death, viewed from a more exalted standpoint, even a higher unity appears since the victory of the Lion of the tribe of Judah; and certainly it is a truth as unquestionable as glorious, of which Paul here reminds the Christians at Rome, that Christ, who both died, and rose, and revived, may be termed the Lord both of the dead and of the living.

How strikingly with a single touch is the *glory of Christ* here pictured to us! No dominion can be imagined which in extent surpasses His. Even the mightiest monarch, although he had at last conquered the whole world, yet only sways his sceptre over the living; friend and foe alike escape from his authority, as soon as the chill breath of death blows in their face. The dominion of Christ extends not merely over the living, but over the much more numerous community of the dead; it embraces not only the visible world, but also the invisible; it is one and the same law which is obeyed on this side of the grave and on yonder. His *right* to reign over both is founded on this double and irrevocable fact of His death and resurrection. Not through the blood of natives or of strangers, but through His own blood has He made His way to the throne, and delivered His subjects out of the power of sin and death, in order that they should be His own possession; yea, the Father has raised Him with the distinct purpose to

invest Him with the highest power. His dominion has thus no narrower *boundary* than in constantly increasing measure to unite under the same blessed sceptre the living and those already dead ; and its imperishable *duration* can least of all be doubted where the King Himself is exalted above all danger of dying, and even death in His domain is only a subordinate servant of the state.

But thus the *happy destiny of the Christian* as the subject of this King appears in the clearest light before us. Even during life he is no more his own, as the servant of the world is, but belongs to a Lord to whom he is bound by the most holy ties, who can and will employ and strengthen him in His service, and allow him to remain in it so long as His wisdom sees best. Thus the meanest obtains notice, and the lowliest the dignity of employment among those who, with the eye directed to the Lord, whether they live, live unto Him. But, moreover, whether we die, we die unto the Lord ; and the darkness of death ceases when we know that it can do no more than transport us to another portion of the same dominion, or, so to speak, take us to another apartment in the same edifice, where we shall meet with other subjects of the same Sovereign. Sometimes we scarcely know whether we would prefer to live or die ; but in the difficulty of this choice a blessed calm becomes our portion in the thought, 'whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.' Dying or living, we are and remain invested with a rank, the high rank of His servants ; called to a task, not our will but His can bring to pass ; protected by a power before which both on this side the grave and beyond it, all must bow unconditionally. Thus the vacillating desire to live or to die is altered and overruled by the one best desire, that whether here or going hence we may be well-pleasing to the Lord, from whose dominion we cannot in any case escape, but would not if we could.

Yes, this is the holy *vocation*, resulting from the inviolable relation between Christ and His people. Is He alone the Lord over dead and living? Not without reason are we here reminded by the apostle that we cannot be cautious enough in our judgment of others. 'But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.' Let us rather look to ourselves that we not merely possess this consolation; but further, through a living faith constantly enjoy it more, both during our stay on earth and at our departure. And above all, let it be our watchword and rejoicing, that Christ may be magnified, whether in our life or in our death. The shortest pilgrimage is long enough; but yet eternity itself will never be too long, when both, undivided, are devoted to His glory.



TWENTY-THIRD APRIL.

'But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.'—
1 THESS. iv. 13.

IGNORANCE is sometimes bliss, but more frequently a burden, and always a source of peculiar trouble when it regards persons or things concerning which it is impossible that we should be wholly indifferent. Although we know even with Paul that the dead and risen Christ is Lord both of the dead and living, how should it be possible for us to dry the tears of sorrow by the grave of our friends, if absolutely nothing concerning their present condition and future destiny were known to us? Yet even in this region, God be thanked, we have not to grope in utter darkness: the same apostle, who elsewhere so impressively warns every man among the Roman converts not to think of

himself more highly than he ought to think (Rom. xii. 3), here calls upon all the bereaved and grief-laden: 'I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep.' Even where no one any longer runs the risk of the misconception which gave occasion to the extravagant sorrow of the Christians of Thessalonica, instruction in the knowledge of faith beside the graves of our deceased friends asleep in Jesus still maintains its unmistakeable value.

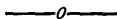
Is it then asked what we know of those whom death has reft from our sight, but not, at the same time, from our affection? This at least is certain, they are not dead, but live in an infinitely higher sense than they have ever lived on earth: outwardly parted from us, they are therefore just the nearer in fellowship to Him who received them into glory; and even between ourselves and them the cleft shall not subsist for ever; they who were together in Christ shall find each other happier, purer, more constant than they had ever been whilst here. *On what grounds* do we feel sure of this? Paul reminds us of it in the context of the passage under consideration. Christ *died*; but not for those alone who then were living below: for one generation as evanescent as the beasts of the field, God would not have given up His own Son to the death of the cross. Christ *rose again*; but He, who has preceded His people in life and in glory, cannot possibly leave them to sleep eternally. Christ *shall come a second time*; but whether this takes place a few years hence or after ages, it is impossible that this advent should be less than the hour in which His perfect triumph over death and the grave is manifested and sealed. At this last revelation of the Head, all the members too shall appear in glory unfading and incorruptible; whether earlier or later they have fallen asleep, they are equally raised to life through Him, and crowned with joy and

honour. The Church militant and triumphant, now divided by the grave as by a wall unscalable, sees at once a radiant conclusion, the hour of the reunion and the glorifying of both. 'The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we, which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.' Questions remain here which no angel can answer; but enough: like a friendly star through the clouds this last declaration shines down on us through every mist, and confidently we leave the care of the fulfilment of this word of His testimony to Him, who here speaks in riddles in order that He may gladden the hearts of His people with the surprise.

And *whither tends* this knowledge? Before all things, in order that we should praise Him who through this gospel satisfies the deepest craving, and holds forth a light over death and the grave, in comparison with which all the brightness of this world's wisdom fades into dim twilight. But certainly not less, in order to console us when we behold the arrows of death speed so unceasingly, and see, moreover, those borne from us whom we in our shortsighted vision deem cannot be done without. The word Indispensable stands once firmly fixed in the vocabulary of Providence; the word Inconsolable must not be found in that of the Christian. Certainly, through the gospel of consolation natural grief is shown to be *allowable*. Did not Jesus Himself weep at the grave of Lazarus? and would it be good if our hearts were hard as rocks, which can be struck and not yield water? But not the less is our grief alleviated by the representation of how much they whom we deplore have gained, at least if in life and death they were the Lord's. Alas, our most legitimate grief is yet coupled with so much selfishness, and we so often look exclusively on our own loss, as if in truth ought can be lost

which belongs to Him who has the keys of death and of the grave! Whilst we sit here clad in the garb of woe, our friends asleep in Christ already stand before the throne of God and of the Lamb, invested in robes of spotless white; and could they speak to us, they would undoubtedly censure immoderate grief for them, sorrowing as those who have no hope. If we have really hope, then let our sorrow be controlled and *hallowed*, that through it we may be prepared for joy eternal and undisturbed. Let us comfort not ourselves merely, but others also, with these words, the only ones which can give real consolation; and above all, let us live so close to the Lord, that in death we may leave this comfort with those who remain behind to bewail us. It would be so sad, if by our lifeless remains it should be whispered: Let us not lift the veil. It would be so glorious if on good grounds our friends may exclaim: His desire is granted:—

‘Oh, Word of God, how bright to me
 Thou makest what drew forth my tears!
 E’en death’s dark vale in light of Thee
 Like morning dawn dispels my fears.
 Rise, beaming light! life is restored,
 We shall henceforth be with the Lord.’—N. N.



TWENTY-FOURTH APRIL.

‘☉ death, where is thy sting? ☉ grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.’—
 I COR. xv. 55-57.

IT is not a small thing to have good grounds for speaking with calmness of our death. It is a still greater thing not merely to await death tranquilly, but to meet it joyfully. Yet what designation will ye accord

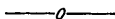
to that man who will freely challenge the king of terrors to combat; yea, in his presence will dare to sing the song of triumph over death and the grave? He stands forth before you in the words of the text, certainly one of the finest and bravest utterances which ever escaped the lips and the heart of Paul. The apostle places himself in the spirit on the field of resurrection, and salutes with this song of blessing the great Easter morning, on which, in its full sense, was accomplished the word which was written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'

Bold, nay, arrogant, this peerless song of triumph sounds to us at the first hearing. In one word, borrowing from the declaration of God by Hosea (xiii. 14), he challenges the last foe to verify his power; the kingdom of death, if it can, to hold but one prisoner in its dungeon. From his elevated standpoint, he looks down a moment on the enemy, who on his challenge preserves an impotent silence. 'The sting of death is sin:' the figure is borrowed from the shepherd in the East, who with a sharp-pointed staff urges forward the herd of cattle; and 'the strength of sin is the law:' it is this which has armed death with this sharp weapon, since it menaces the curse on its transgression. Yet that is now all past, past never to return; and after the description of this shadow, the tone of triumph is resumed, and rises yet higher to exult in life and light: '*But thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.*' Mark well: it stands not, who *shall* give us the victory, whenever, after years or centuries, Christ shall come a second time in order to make an end of death; but 'who *giveth*' us the victory—now, unconditionally, at the present moment. To us who already bore death within our veins, but who are at the same time heirs of eternal life; to us He not only gives peace with death, but perfect conquest over it. Yet once more, does not this sound too bold and arrogant? is it not more a song

for dwellers in heaven than for inhabitants of earth? befits it well this vast churchyard, where ever and anon one brother comes bearing another to the grave?

So may it frequently appear, and yet we say it without hesitation, this song of triumph is *perfectly justifiable, and, moreover, inexhaustible in its application*. Undoubtedly, well assured belief alone can so speak; and even this not at all times, and then only as therein lives and works the clear consciousness of what God in His Son has bestowed on us. But thus it may, though not without trembling, rejoice; at least it vaunts not in the conquest gained by itself, but in that which God has bestowed. 'Through Jesus Christ our Lord' is the only key to the problem; but this is perfectly satisfactory, because just for this reason, that Christ hath redeemed His people from the curse and the dominion of sin, the conquest over death is determined in principle. When death, as a foe who comes to demand our life, exists no more for the redeemed as the king of terrors, that which really lives in us is too strong for his power. It is here simply, so to speak, a question of time: death still reigns and rages; but as in a vast realm, a subjugated vassal whose sentence has been long since signed, and whose throne only by favour suffered, shall at his conqueror's nod be overturned. His sting is blunted in the blood of Christ, and the shadows of the grave are transfigured by a soft ray of glory, so that the eye beholds no dungeon, but a wide opening portal, through which already beams forth splendour ineffable. Have we not seen those who with death before them, nay, who in a certain sense already feel themselves beneath it, and in whose glazing eyes may yet be read: all is well with me beyond the power of speech to utter? Have ye never received from faint lips the testimony which bears stronger evidence for the divine authority of the gospel than many volumes: 'More than conqueror through Him

who loved us'? But still the beautiful image from the *Pilgrim's Progress* is ever verified: 'When Christian seems about to sink, Hopeful here with much ado yet kept his brother's head above water;' and when anew the word of promise is understood, the firm ground is gained by tottering feet. Nay, glorious song of triumph, thou art as little an idle sound as a baseless fabrication: thou canst not be silent, unless faith in the risen Prince of life should first be dead! What an unspeakable cause of thankfulness to Him who even here will lay on lips impure as ours, and soon to be silent in the dust of death, such sound of jubilee! What boundless grace, which in Christ Jesus will give to us, worthy of death and condemnation, such a victory! What an inestimable consolation when we lament the loss of Christian friends: they were urged forwards to the tomb, but with a staff which had no pointed sting of sin. What ecstatic hope this song of triumph brings, too bright and bold for words to utter! World-renowned is the final chorus in the *Messiah* of Handel, contained just in these words; but what shall the full chorus of the *Messiah* be up there, sung as from the grave of the dead? The tones, ah! if our ears now heard them! The multitude, ah! if our eyes beheld them!



TWENTY-FIFTH APRIL.

'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.'—I COR. xv. 58.

VOICES which echo forth the song of triumph over death and the grave are all too few; and even in many a heart in which they once were heard, silence now reigns. Whence does this proceed? Assuredly, because the powerful exhortation wherewith Paul closes

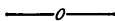
his triumphant pleading for the doctrine of the resurrection is too little understood and obeyed. It is an exhortation to steadfast *confidence* on the one side; but on the other, to inflexible *loyalty*, worthy at all times, but specially at the present, to be considered with devout earnestness.

‘Therefore, my beloved brethren’—thus he concludes; and on this ‘beloved,’ in a time of so much heartlessness and discord as ours, distinct emphasis may well be laid; ‘be ye steadfast, unmoveable,’ that is to say, in your most holy faith, in which ye are strengthened anew. Steadfast against yourselves, immoveable against influence from without, which might undermine and shake you. Behold an admonition of which undoubtedly the Church at Corinth then had special need; yet is there one of us now present to whom it is less necessary? Was there then unbelief and levity to be found there; and do we not know those who hold the assured hope of faith even as a child’s story? There worldliness and sinful lust had sway: are there not yet many whom Paul might address as ‘fools;’ and again, ‘some have not the knowledge of God, I speak this to your shame’? Are not many carried away before our eyes by the stream of scepticism, which takes all from us and gives us nought instead, and which benumbs souls in life, in order after death to reduce the body to ashes, and make the churchyard, God’s acre, a dunghill? Ah! how in our days all things seem to conspire against a simple, childlike faith in the gospel of the resurrection, and in Him who is its head! How necessary it is against the spirit of unbelief, which sports with death and eternity, and not less against the boundless levity which literally counts all departed as blessed, to enforce this solemn scripture: ‘He who believeth in the Son hath eternal life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him’! It

is thus, but on no other condition ; in order to have peace with death, peace with God must be concluded, and there is no peace with God save through the atonement of Christ. Then alone have we no longer cause to dread the sharp-pointed staff of death as herdsman, when truly we are the sheep of the Good Shepherd, out of whose hand not even the last foe can wrest so much as one.

But if we are indeed walking in the path of faith and penitence, then the second part of the exhortation concerns us more, not merely to remain stedfast in the fiercely-contested confidence of faith, but also to continue inflexibly *loyal* to our earthly and heavenly calling. 'Always abounding in the work of the Lord ;' certainly this is not of small import to those who take themselves seriously to task for their employment of life in its full extent. The task may be difficult, the strength small, the resistance great, the temptation to stop in the middle of our course almost irresistible ; yet it is only to him that endureth to the end, that the crown of life is promised, and no fidelity shall fail wherever it is *known*, by well-assured belief, that labour in the Lord cannot possibly be *vain*. Or how, Christian, knowest thou not that there cometh a harvest day of eternity, and wilt thou sow sparingly ? Thou knowest that the measure of thy glory in heaven shall be in exact proportion to thy sanctification here ; and wilt thou be content to have the place of the tiniest star, when by the grace of God thou mightest shine as the moon, nay, as the sun ? Thou knowest that nothing is lost that is done for the Lord, yet thou canst dream and wanton away the moments on whose wings eternity reposes ? But one of two things must be the case with thee : either thou *knowest* not really those things which thou dost profess to prize, or the assured knowledge of faith is for thee merely dead treasure, not capital bearing interest

for heaven. Alas! this also belongs to the misery of our age, that many a believer lives and works as if the insulted gospel were a fable. Here lies often the deepest source of so much inward dryness and darkness: the lips cannot rejoice, because the heart condemns us. Certainly the foundation of our hope lies beyond ourselves; but its life and joy must languish so long as this passage stands written in vain for us: 'He that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure.' There is no speculation which can give us comfort if it is not combined with strict practice; so long as there is no life in us, what can truth avail us? 'Therefore, my beloved brethren:' may the Holy Spirit inscribe indelibly upon our hearts what follows; and may Eternal Truth Himself make us more faithful to Him, and less hurtful to ourselves!



TWENTY-SIXTH APRIL.

'I know that my Redeemer liveth.'—JOB xix. 25.

WHERE the Christian song of triumph over death and the grave is adopted, there is added an epitaph, which testifies of firm faith and living hope. Can you imagine one more desirable than that which the patient sufferer of old covets for himself, and which forms our text to-day? He is occupied, as appears from the context (ver. 23), in the preparation of his epitaph: he wishes it in Eastern fashion engraved indelibly in a rock; and since he had no longer any expectation of deliverance in this life, he refers to the only thing which makes his sufferings tolerable—his expectation on yon side the grave. 'I know,'—thus it runs,—'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall

stand the last upon the earth.’¹ His God he regards as his Goël, his avenger of blood, who lives eternally, and who will not cease, even after the death of His servant, to vindicate his misjudged honour. In the spirit Job sees Him stand by his lonely resting-place, as with drawn sword in His hand to keep off every assailant; as watcher beside his corpse, and who shall make his righteous cause triumphant: ‘And when they,’ thus he goes on, ‘after my skin shall have gnawed through this,’ as after this outward covering the flesh under it would be wholly wasted and consumed, ‘then shall I out of my flesh (that is, deprived of flesh, entirely stripped of this tortured shell) see God.’² And this God he shall see (ver. 27), not as a stranger, but as a friend and protector; and now at last, in the land of complete freedom, taste perfect enjoyment. Who can wonder that the epitaph thus completed is sealed by a sigh of inexpressible longing, ‘though my reins be consumed within me’?

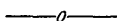
On more than one account is this epitaph of Job interesting also to our age, especially as a proof how the prospect of life and immortality, brought to light through the gospel, was not entirely absent in earlier times, and had manifested its power for the consolation and sanctification of the heart that was bowed down. The avowal of the hope here declared is, at the same time, remarkable for a sublimity, a truth, a power too high for description. What wonder that the epitaph of Job, in whole or in part, is still chiselled upon many a headstone; that poetry and music have honoured it in more than one fashion; that at the present day it cannot be read attentively without an involuntary sigh

¹ The English version of the passage runs thus: ‘And that He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth.’

² English version: ‘And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.’—JOB xix. 26.—*Translator.*

swelling many a bosom, and the mournful prayer being uttered, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his'! What is here expressed is a knowledge of faith, indispensable as our only consolation, but, at the same time, so invaluable for our eternal peace, that even the greatest sage may involuntarily envy the man who goes to meet eternity with this well-assured 'I know' in his heart and in his mouth. Can we hear it without thinking, on the one side, how far we stand *beneath* this sufferer of olden times; but also, on the other side, how much *higher* are our privileges than his? Knowledge is in many respects, with reason, the vaunt and the power of our age; and more than one question, to which Antiquity could give no answer, has advanced with giant stride towards satisfactory solution. But how many of the children of this century are there to whom, if the questions of redemption and resurrection do indeed arise in their hearts, they remain unanswered! What numbers are there who call themselves Christians, and yet on the point of their prospects after death rather preserve a sombre silence; nay, even of the upright in heart, who dare not believe that they believe, and that thus they are called to glory and happiness! Ah! the chill north wind, which oftentimes in spring kills the most lovely blossoms, is less keen than the deadly breath of unbelief and doubt, which has passed over the field of so many hearts; and the question might in some respects almost be forgiven, if men on the ground of God's testimony still maintain a hope which stretches beyond the grave. And yet in many ways how greatly are we privileged *above* the times of grey antiquity; we, for whom has arisen, not merely the morning star of expectation, but, moreover, the sun of fulfilment! We know Him who is more than the Goël in Israel; the first-fruits of them that slept, whose work shall not be finished before the last of His people is restored to life out of the dust.

We have heard and believed the good news: 'this corruptible must put on incorruption;' we know, as many as believe, that we shall not merely see our Redeemer, but even—entrancing prospect!—we shall then be like Him. How must, occasionally, the voiceless home-sickness of the children of God fill our hearts, and the 'Oh, to be there!' re-echo in their inmost depths! How far we are removed from this is only known above; but already something has been attained if we more earnestly than ever before endeavour *like* Job to be assured on secure grounds that our Redeemer liveth, and that we shall live with Him. Not on his epitaph alone it stands,—the angels of the judgment have very little reverence for epitaphs,—but on the certain knowledge of belief, of which this is the expression: 'I know that my Redeemer liveth.' What avails all your knowledge, whilst ye remain uncertain of this one needful thing? What injury does all your ignorance do you, whilst your trembling hand clings firmly to this rock of stable foundation?



TWENTY-SEVENTH APRIL.

'And ye now therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.'—JOHN xvi. 22.

'CANTATE, jubilate'—rejoice and sing! With the names borrowed from the commencement of well-known psalms, the Christian Church has designated, from early times, two of the Sundays in this division of the ecclesiastical year; and in this manner, too, the voices are interpreted which now from all sides resound together in the kingdom of nature and in the kingdom of grace. How much is there in the forty days between Easter and Ascension which justifies such an exclamation!

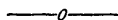
tion, especially when we think on the manner in which the Prince of life fulfilled the first mysterious promise of the glorious text! Among the Fathers of the Church, some are of opinion that He, during that memorable period, repeated His farewell discourse to John, and reminded him of many sayings of this last evening, which now through the result were placed in the most glorious light; and although there appear no grounds for such an idea, who can without inward satisfaction regard the prophecy of the happy reunion which should follow on the short parting?

‘I shall see you again,’—yea, certainly this promise must refer to the great *festival* of the *apostolic* life, not merely to the fleeting moments of meeting again, however blissful these might be, when the risen Saviour first let them hear His greeting of peace, and spake with them concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God; but also, and specially, to that period of spiritual meeting together through the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, when first they rightly comprehended: ‘A little time, and ye shall see me, because I go unto my Father.’ Assuredly, only when in the Comforter the Master Himself had come anew unto His own, was the promise fully accomplished: ‘In that day ye shall ask me nothing.’ They had now the true light and life within, and in both the source of a joy which no earthly power could take away from them.

But, at the same time, does not the *glory* of the *Christian* life appear in our text before the enlightened vision of the spirit? In truth, through sorrow to gladness is the experience of all who have been planted with the Lord in the likeness both of His death and of His resurrection; and whether our attention be turned to the beginning, the middle, or the end of the Christian’s life on earth, we behold this marvellous saying verified in various ways, and often strikingly. With

the new man the same has place as a rule as with the old. He is born crying, and only through the dark depths of humility succeeds in climbing the shining heights of the life of faith and gladsome hope. But even when the new-born babe has become a child, a youth—nay, even a man in Christ, still in principle it is the same; yea, throughout the whole spiritual life, light and shade vary from day to day incessantly. 'Ye now therefore have sorrow:' who can count the vast multitudes of disciples to whom the Good Master must constantly repeat this saying? and who can tell how many a broken heart is carried under a festal robe, a fasting soul beneath a cheerful countenance? Has the Christian seasons when, like David, he can tune his harp? he has also those when, like Jeremiah, he can elicit nought but notes of plaint. Yet—inestimable consolation—no mournful alas! no painful wherefore? becomes the last word in the life of any child of God; because He who is faithful still makes His saying true: 'I shall see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.' Even the Ash-Wednesday of the soul that longs for Him becomes the time of Advent; after each Passion Week follows the Easter of the Resurrection, and the inward fast of the children of the bride-chamber becomes, not always it may be, after a short time, but still at the right season, changed into a new spiritual festival. The eye beholds the Prince of life again as through a mist of tears; and if the soul was before like Noah's dove, which everywhere sought rest in vain, it returns immediately back to the ark, but not without the olive leaf of peace, safe from all storms. Thus goes it in the little world within; now clouds, now sun, now sowing in tears, then reaping in joy; but always again the joy returns, which is poured forth through the Saviour Himself,—a joy which may, no doubt, for a time be injured, but cannot possibly be wholly lost. More deeply rooted, fairer and more

flourishing, it shines in eyes clouded and blind, nay, glazing in death, and just then it points to something higher and greater; for the saying of Jesus is indeed prophetic of His people's *future* life of bliss. Life without Christ on earth was pain without true joy; life in and through Him an incessant alternation of joy and pain; but 'a little while,' and then pain flees away, then death expires, and joy ascends to the height of the cloudless midday sun. Perfect joy, a joy which none can take away; and this shall be our portion eternally when a *little* time is past! Oh ye who lack this prospect, how can ye be glad? Oh ye who have it, how can ye be sorrowful? Oh Thou who givest and fulfillest this prospect, how must we, even though we see Thee not, yet love Thee and rejoice in Thee with joy unspeakable and full of glory!



TWENTY-EIGHTH APRIL.

'Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God.'—ACTS x. 40, 41.

AMONG the doubts which during the last two centuries have been brought forward against the reality of the Lord's resurrection, and which recently have been repeated again and again, belongs the remark that all the appearances on which the truth of this miracle rests, took place exclusively among His friends, but that we look in vain for witnesses among His enemies. Perhaps to this charge we might reply that the risen Saviour appeared at least to one foe and persecutor, namely, to Saul of Tarsus; but we rather observe, that the imagined difficulty cannot have appeared overwhelming in the eyes of Peter, since he himself, and without apparent inducement, com-

municated the fact, and this, too, on the occasion of the first preaching of the gospel in the house of a Gentile. He was thus aware, and of his own accord points out, that not all the people, but merely a chosen circle, had seen the Lord after His resurrection. And, indeed, of this apparently enigmatical circumstance, the *reason* is easy to explain, and the *significance* not to be denied.

In the first place, the question is: if a manifestation of the risen Saviour to the whole nation, which some suppose desirable, was indeed possible. Now it seems to us that it was with a real but not with an ordinary human body that the Lord arose from the grave, and showed Himself to His followers. The inquiry thus stands open: if this glorified body was of such a nature that it fell within the reach and perception of the unbelieving and disobedient, or if these did not lack the organ necessary for such a manifestation from the other world. In the most favourable case, they might have been persuaded that He who appeared to them showed a surprising likeness to the crucified Jesus; but the conviction that it was indeed He, that He had really died and really risen again, that this resuscitated being must be no less than the Christ, the King of Israel, would not necessarily have followed.

But, on the other hand, even allowing this possibility, the Lord was on no account bound to such a manifestation to the whole of the nation or their rulers. By their rejection of Him, and calling down His blood upon themselves and their children, the people of Israel had themselves severed the bond which bound them to their Messiah, and shown themselves unworthy of the honour of His new manifestation in the midst of them. He, execrated by His countrymen, will not urge Himself on their acceptance in spite of their hostility and ingratitude; already it was much and great that He, through the word of the apostles and the spirit of testimony,

condescended to come to His own, after that they in such a manner had declared that they would not have this King to reign over them.

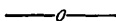
Something more than this: it would, in the third place, have been in opposition to the spiritual nature of His kingdom. Can He who once already, in the days of His flesh, had withdrawn from the multitude who sought to take Him by force and to make Him a king (John vi. 15), now desire that thousands of arms should be stretched forth around Him to raise Him to the throne of David, if men have at last been convinced of His true sovereignty?

Rather, in the fourth place, it may be asserted on good grounds that the sign of the prophet Jonas for the great majority of this adulterous and sinful generation would be equally fruitless with so many other signs and tokens. 'Neither would they have believed, although one rose from the dead:' this saying is not too severe for those who, after the miracle at Bethany, entered on a deliberation how they might put to death Lazarus along with Jesus (John xii. 10). Who does not tremble at the idea of the possibility of a fresh attempt to murder the Messiah, albeit the attempt were vain?

Contemplated from this side, it becomes, lastly, an evidence of the judicious kindness of the Lord, that He withheld a revelation, the repeated rejection of which would only have called forth an absolutely irrevocable sentence. By appearing fruitlessly to His enemies, the Lord would have made the preaching of the gospel in the midst of them impracticable; because benefits like His cannot possibly continue to be urged. And should then really an appearance to Pilate or Caiaphas have stamped the truth of His resurrection so much better than His manifestation to Peter or Thomas?

Nay, here too Wisdom is justified of all her chil-

dren ; and he who for this reason refuses belief in the gospel, is shamed by many foes who have received it. But if even the so-called appearance had nothing critical, it showed nevertheless a very serious and interesting side. Yea, it is indeed, as Judas, not Iscariot, already had perceived regarding the Master (John xiv. 22), that the Lord manifested Himself unto His disciples, but not to the world. He who by his own fault is utterly incapable, hostile, obstinate, the Lord at last will pass by : there are those who do not see the sun, and cannot see the sun, because they have covered their faces. Unbelief may hear of the Prince of life, enough for its salvation, or for its condemnation ; belief alone can see Him, and comprehend something of the glory of His new life. Lord, go by none of us, and open first our ears, then unbandage too our eyes that we may see Thee!



TWENTY-NINTH APRIL.

‘ But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore.’—

JOHN xxi. 4.

WHENCE proceeds the marvellous power of attraction which the narrative of the appearance at the sea of Tiberias by John constantly has for the Christian mind ? Is it only on account of the loveliness of the region in which the story is placed ; or the internal evidence of truth and authenticity, which it so abundantly possesses ; or the calm splendour of the resurrection which lies spread over it ? Assuredly all this, but much more still, because it so entirely displays the character of a *manifestation* ; a breaking through of the light of a higher world into this cloudy one of ours ; a reflection of the most blessed present in a life-picture of the glorious past. Yea, a life-picture, for who can

behold the risen Saviour coming to His disciples after the lapse of a considerable period from His first appearance, without the tones of John's exclamation, 'It is the Lord,' finding deep echo in his soul?

Verily, it is He who, in spite of all diversities, just as He did at that hour, *binds together* all His followers in the unity of faith and love. What brought and kept together these seven men in yonder fishing-boat, but the common relation to Him who is the centre of all their hopes and wishes? Thus the living Christ is still the bond which unites all His people, and His word the light which guides them, as it was His voice which had brought them to Galilee.

Yet He does not manifest Himself until a time of preparation, of expectation, nay, even of disappointment has been gone through. It is He who *tries* His people, as here, through patient waiting and apparently fruitless working. How often is it with us as with these fishermen! We torment ourselves without advancing a step; we hear our one gift asked for others, and we are ourselves so poor and needy, that we should wish to receive; we wrestle through a night of trial, which scarcely seems to have an end, and we sigh: when will it be morning?

But the morning comes, and with it the Lord, who *surprises* His followers, as when He in the light of the new day stood already on the shore waiting for the seven disciples, His heart full of love, and His hands overflowing with blessing. It often happens to us, as to five of these seven, we do not discover the Friend from heaven in one word of marvellous power, or in one striking act; but he who has an eye like John always recognises the Lord by His work; and blessed is he then, at least, who, like Peter, in spite of all difficulties and dangers, rests not until he has approached as close as possible to Him! Thus, as here, Jesus comes still in

the Spirit to His followers, not merely once, but repeatedly, according to His promise, just at the right time, and in a manner entirely in conformity with their necessities. When the trial of patience is passed through, the surprise appears the more beautiful ; and now that it is first apparent that they can show Him nothing but defect, it is soon evident that He has nothing but fulness of joy to bestow on them.

Yes, it is He, who quickeneth His own people, as only the Good Shepherd can, who has come in order that the sheep not merely may live, but also may have abundantly. Arrived at the shore, the disciples find the meal prepared, and in the centre of the circle tarries the Master, who fills their mouths with food, their hearts with peace. Thousands of unanswered questions hover upon their lips ; but do they then require to know all ? and may not we also, in such memorable hours of spiritual life-experience, repeat with them : ' I have received everything I need, and I have abundance ' ? Enough : we see it in the signs, we feel it in the peace of God in our heart, we do not require to hear it for the first time from a third party, that it is the Lord out of whose fulness we receive what none other than He can give.

And this especially appears continually, that it is He still ever who through trial and result together *nourishes* His followers, and forms them for their highest destiny, as undoubtedly as this abundant draught of fishes, after continued disappointment, must have furnished for these fishers of men an example and prophecy of what they must expect in His service, when they at a later period should cast the net of His word into the great sea of this world. Yet every good gift from the hand of the Lord is the presage of a better ; every manifestation the forerunner of experience ; and every experience a pledge of higher joy enjoyed in His fellowship. Oh, who would not long after Him as Lord, whose glorified life

behold the risen Saviour coming to His disciples after the lapse of a considerable period from His first appearance, without the tones of John's exclamation, 'It is the Lord,' finding deep echo in his soul?

Verily, it is He who, in spite of all diversities, just as He did at that hour, *binds together* all His followers in the unity of faith and love. What brought and kept together these seven men in yonder fishing-boat, but the common relation to Him who is the centre of all their hopes and wishes? Thus the living Christ is still the bond which unites all His people, and His word the light which guides them, as it was His voice which had brought them to Galilee.

Yet He does not manifest Himself until a time of preparation, of expectation, nay, even of disappointment has been gone through. It is He who *tries* His people, as here, through patient waiting and apparently fruitless working. How often is it with us as with these fishermen! We torment ourselves without advancing a step; we hear our one gift asked for others, and we are ourselves so poor and needy, that we should wish to receive; we wrestle through a night of trial, which scarcely seems to have an end, and we sigh: when will it be morning?

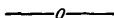
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is such an inestimable blessing for all His people ; but to whom then would it be a grievance to wait a long time in His service? To the living Church of the Lord this time is in many respects like the night-watch by the sea of Galilee. Much labour is taken in the service of the kingdom of God, but without visible blessing : He has promised to come, but He delays longer than men expected. The silent night is witness to many a sigh, but the morning dawns, the Master appears, the meal awaits, the draught of fishes is extraordinary, and what John had first surmised, all the disciples now know well, that it is the Lord who thus stoops down to His followers. Bow down before Him, O our souls !



THIRTIETH APRIL.

‘ Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Feed my sheep. Follow thou me.’

—JOHN xxi. 15-22.

THE conversation of the Lord with Peter immediately after the manifestation at the sea of Tiberias, however familiar, is so captivating, and at the same time so instructive, that every year anew it well deserves to be considered with all seriousness in public or in private. And that not only to invest with its high significance, for Peter and all others called to it, the holy office of the ministry ; but, moreover, that the thrice repeated question it contains may be understood, and give instruction concerning that which the Lord, under all changes of time and circumstances, still asks and expects from every one who desires to be truly His disciple.

The first of the three is *love*, not merely with the general attachment with which we regard all that is good and beautiful, but evidently the constantly changing but always deeper direction of the question is

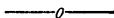
toward the personal, fervent, dominant affection which the friend displays towards his bosom companion, the ransomed towards his Redeemer, and which would make it easier for us to forsake whatever else is dearest, rather than to be divided from Him. 'Lovest thou me with all the power of thy soul above all other love?'—this is the question of life and conscience which He incessantly puts to each one of those who once with Peter have experienced: 'Lord, to whom can we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' Anything higher we feel that Jesus cannot ask; nay, the claim would be even as little allowable as the fulfilment, if He who thus speaks were anything less than God's own Son, the Saviour of a sinful world, the Sovereign of God's kingdom, who has an unconditional right to the whole hearts of His subjects. And yet nothing less can He claim from us, if He in truth confess us as His disciples; because not only, or specially, by the professing lips, the busy hand, the ready feet, but by the loving heart, the disciple of the best of Masters may be known. Of such a love there evidently can be no question so long as no personal relation subsists; only the pardoned sinner, like Peter, is in a state and condition to exhibit it, for it is the first and most precious fruit of a humble and grateful faith. Where this faith really lives in us, and shows the blessed consciousness that mercy has been bestowed on us, there this love, however defective, cannot possibly be utterly absent. Even beneath the penetrating eye of the Searcher of hearts it is conscious of itself, in no degree of its perfection, but not the less of its sincerity; it abides the scrutiny of Him who loveth truth in the inward part; and so well-pleasing is it in His holy eyes, that where the first word is heard the second will not be delayed.

To serve the Lord—thus it runs—whom we love, in our calling and sphere; this He requires of each of His

followers. 'Feed my lambs: tend my sheep: feed my sheep;' how should Peter have had the right, the courage, the strength for this, without the witness of his conscience, that notwithstanding all his infidelity he yet loved the Lord supremely? Yet who also, who knows what love is, would withdraw himself from Jesus' service, because he had never received such a special appointment to labour in the midst of the community? But, at least, the task of strengthening the weak, healing the sick, bringing discord into harmony, in a word, of being the light, the salt, and the blessing of the world, especially in our own sphere, is incumbent on all the subjects of God's kingdom; and in this shall the Lord recognise us as His disciples, if love constrains us to do all in our power for the honour of His name and the salvation of souls. In the smallest sphere as well as in the greatest, a man can only be a good shepherd over the souls of others in so far as he is himself a good sheep of the Great Shepherd; but if we have in truth committed our souls to His protection, we shall not ask how little service will be accepted, but rather, how much can we accomplish.

Never can the work be properly directed by our own choice, for the word *follow* is in the Christian life of great significance: follow, not only on the path of *action*, but especially of *suffering*: follow, not merely in the general sense in which it is addressed to each disciple, but in that more peculiar, in which it makes distinction between Peter and John; nay, even further, the distinction which makes a different demand on the Peter of the time then present, than on the Peter of an earlier period. Follow the call of Jesus, each in his own sphere and vocation; the guidance of Jesus, each in his own course of life; the footsteps of Jesus, each in his own special cross. Oh, I say not that this is easy, much less that it is pleasing to flesh and blood, but yet that it is

honour, duty, happiness ; and this above all, that no one ever yet repented who on this injunction : ' Follow thou me,' humbly and cheerfully went forth after Jesus. Hereafter, by the result, the aim and course of His guidance will be understood, even as we read the Bible in Hebrew backwards. Only, and never forget this limitation, it is alone possible to *follow* thus unconditionally when we have attained rightly to *serve* ; we cannot serve without true love, and least of all can *love* without belief and grace. Lord, bestow on us the heart of Peter, and lead us forth Thyself, though it should be by as steep a path as his !



FIRST MAY.

' Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth.'—ISA. lxv. 17.

RENEWAL—is not this the great word which everywhere meets us, when we must again enter upon that month of the year which, notwithstanding many disappointments, is yet the fairest of them all, and named the festival month of spring? And well may it be so termed, whene'er we cast our eye on the great *change* which the kingdom of nature shows us at every step. What a contrast between what existed only a few weeks ago and that which is now, or at least is daily progressing,—light out of darkness, life from the dead, renewed enjoyment in the soul, which often feels itself as if made young again on the contemplation of the glories of creation ! When do we ever more heartily than now peruse this lovely song of spring : ' The winter is past, the rain is over and gone ; the flowers appear on the earth ; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land ' ? (Song of

Sol. ii. 11, 13.) However great the difference may be between a spring day in the Holy Land and in our cloudy West, yet still we rejoice that we can here again contemplate the renewal of the face of the earth around us, because each day makes us witnesses of a new and striking *revelation*. 'I create new heavens, and a new earth,' cries the Almighty Maker to us, as with a loud voice, through His works, even as He once spake to Abraham His friend: 'Look up now to heaven.' How much is that man to be pitied who has no eye and heart for the beauties of Nature, from which Job, David, and Isaiah have borrowed their finest emblems, and to which the Saviour Himself incessantly pointed His disciples! But how pitiable also is he—and in our day the number of such is not decreasing—who can rave about the beauties of Nature, and examine her laws, and admire her power, without at the same time reverentially baring the head before the glorious name which stands written in the flowers of the field and in the stars of the firmament! What is Nature without spirit, power without artificer, and law which is not exercised by a superior independent will? Ah! the highest enjoyment of Nature is lost to him for whom it is indeed an invisible workshop, but not, above all, a holy temple, wherein man must feel and show himself a priest ere he can reign as king over creation. Nay, just in this to us consists the beauty of the order of the seasons, because it is a clear reflection of an eternally active spirit, and at the same time of an undying heart, from which streams forth incessantly new light, new love, new life for millions of creatures. Whether we behold the spring for the twentieth or for the sixtieth time in its awakening radiance, so much power and wisdom, so much love and truth are shown us in the greatest and the smallest of its effects, that the song of the sacred writer must be ours morning and evening: 'O Lord

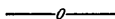
my God, Thou art very great : Thou art clothed with honour and majesty' (Ps. civ. 1).

Only when the heart is thus attuned is the ear opened to the earnest preaching which reviving Nature sounds aloud to us. 'Behold, I create new heavens, and a new earth,' says God ; and the really good man beholds in every return of spring the striking emblem of his glorious destiny on *earth*, but at the same time the presage of his infallible hope for eternity. Ah ! what is even the severest winter compared with the winter of sin, which by nature reigns in every unrenewed mind ; and what would become of us, if in a higher sense the words of the psalmist were not fulfilled : 'Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created : and Thou renewest the face of the earth' ! (Ps. civ. 30.) But just this is the consoling sermon of Nature, it points us to a power to which, moreover, in the little world within, nothing is too great and too marvellous : to a breath of life, which can melt the thickest crust of ice around the sinful heart. Do we know already by our own experience something of the meaning of that passage : 'You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins' ? If not, ah ! then, may this spring be to us in the fullest sense the morning hour of a new life, through the transforming power of grace ! 'The voice of the turtle dove is heard in the land : ' the month of May brings us at the same time nearer to the feast of Pentecost : let us not close our ears to its summons, and the brightness of a fairer hope shall rise to our view. He who by the light of this spirit opens the book of creation, reads this day everywhere the prophecy of this new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. What is even the most beautiful spring morning compared to that which faith may expect, whenever the first things shall have passed away, and all things have become new ? And this spring shall assuredly come : it shall not in a single

point cause disappointment: it ends not in eternity, O Christian!

‘How could thy happiness be clearer,
Each footstep brings thy birthright nearer!’

—J. LUIKEN.



SECOND MAY.

‘Thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.’—Ps. ciii. 5.

SPRING and youth—is it marvel that these two things so near akin from year to year are named in the same breath? When compared together, spring, the youth of the year, resembles youth the spring of life in numerous coincidences. Like youth, the loveliest and fairest season is at the same time the most evanescent: ‘Childhood and youth are vanity,’ says the preacher but too truly (Eccles. xi. 20); and like the blossom period of the year, youth comes not a second time. And yet there is a second youth possible on this side of the grave: it is this of which the psalmist speaks when he vaunts God’s beneficence, who, after sickness and old age have appeared, renews the youth of His people like the eagle’s; and of which in another place the prophetic word has testified: ‘They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.’

‘As eagles:’ a striking image in reference to a nobler matter! With regard to the eagle, it is known that he sometimes lives a hundred years without his eye becoming dim or his strength decreased; that at set times he changes his feathers, when he appears sick and ready to expire. But, behold, soon he is dressed in fresh plumage, and after a short repose he wings his flight anew, and

soars to meet the sun, describing a circle in which the boldest fancy follows him but from far. But is it otherwise with the man who can boast that his iniquities are forgiven, and all his sicknesses are healed? Nay, however bold it may sound, we say not too much when we speak of an *eternal youth* as the glorious privilege of the devout servant of the Lord, but of him alone. All that with reason charms and captivates in the appearance of youth is seen in heightened measure where the spiritual life develops itself undisturbed in fellowship with God. Does the *innocence* of youth attract you? In the natural life it is but too frequently a misleading appearance; but in the life of the soul it returns to a certain extent when the heart is purified through the power of the Holy Ghost, and the life is renewed in conformity with that of Christ the Lord. Does the *enjoyment* of youth surpass in your estimation that of any other here below? Be it so; yet all too speedily it is driven away by the cares of later years, whilst enjoyment free from care even in the dark days may dwell in the heart whereon has descended the peace of God through faith. The *strength* of youth, seems it to you desirable? Ah! day by day stamps truth upon the words: 'Youth shall faint and be weary;' but even when the natural strength has already long attained its zenith, the Christian often feels himself elevated through a power from on high, which lifts him above special weakness; and what no strength of sinew or muscle could accomplish, is attained through the power of implicit faith. Yea, even the beautiful *development* which the period of youth shows you, ye need not seek in vain in that man who, leaning on God's hand, forgetting the things that are behind, stretches forward from light to light, from strength to strength, from bliss to bliss. How, finally, can *hope*, that makes the youthful heart beat high with throbs of joy, be lacking to him? The fairest part of life the sensual man sees

soon behind him, the spiritual man always in prospect ; and like the eagle, this last can often from the low atmosphere around him soar to the pure, clear ether, whence already from afar the image, nay, the ineffable reality, shows him a more than earthly joy.

Eternal youth : it may, yet much more than for David, now be the portion of every Christian, but for these alone. Without faith and hope in the heart, even the bravest determination to remain young always, or at least as long as possible, must give way before the first great storm of life. Yet even when faith and hope are not strangers to us, whence is it that in our spiritual life there is frequently so little of the eagle, spoken of in Ps. ciii., and so much of 'the sparrow alone upon the house-top,' referred to in Ps. cii. 7? Can it be that we allow ourselves too little to be satisfied with the good things of which David had spoken immediately before ; that is to say, that we *live* so little on the best things which God has to bestow,—His word, His Spirit, His grace? Only through these do we attain that lasting second birth, of which the eagle is the emblem, and an unfading youth of heart the inestimable fruit. Ye who are young in years, seek this undying youth above all the joys of early life ! Recover it, ye middle-aged, in living fellowship with Him who maketh all things new within ! Preserve it, old friends of God and of His Christ, as your fairest crown here on earth, and the earnest of your bliss in heaven. And thou Christian, who sittest down disconsolate, bethink thyself ; the eagle lets his wings hang down, only thereafter to soar with stronger flight !

THIRD MAY.

'For we have here no continuing city, but we seek one to come.'—

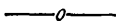
HEB. xiii. 14.

THE beginning of this month sees many change their dwelling, and brings others an abundant portion of household toil and care. But one does not require to enter into a new house in order to experience the truth of the Scripture: 'We have here no continuing city.' Yet what is this word other than a summary of the peculiar *condition of life* in which the man, and even the Christian, finds himself here all his life long? Our life here is a coming and entering upon; and every change in our outward circumstances, whether for good or evil, bears witness that here below uncertainty alone may be termed certain. Even the loveliest spot is only a baiting place on a foreign journey; and even in our earthly home we enjoy so little real rest, that it is constantly as though we heard God's ancient summons: 'Arise ye, and depart; for *this is not your rest*' (Micah ii. 10). Not without reason, assuredly, should this conviction grieve and oppress us, if we knew not through faith that above the land of unrest and disquietude there is a city of rest, whose builder and maker is God. To seek this city is the great *object of life* to which man is called, on which the Christian must especially set his heart, and of which he never loses sight but to his eternal injury. He *seeks* the city to come, not as it were something uncertain, or which might be found anywhere, still less as if it were only to be found at a great distance; but he seeks to approach it as though it already long awaited him; he seeks it in the path of struggle and pain, on which his Lord has gone before him; he seeks to manifest his citizenship not yet obtained, by a heavenly-minded walk, hallowed of God. As an excellent writer of the second century

has described the Christians of his days: 'They inhabit their own native land, but as foreigners. They bear all as citizens, and forbear all as foreigners. Every foreign land is to them fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign. They are in the flesh, but walk not after the flesh. They live on the earth, but are citizens of heaven. They die, but with death true life first begins with them. Though poor, they make many rich; though suffering want, they have all things in abundance; despised, they are glorified in contempt. . . . In a word, what the soul is in the body, are Christians in the world. The soul indeed inhabits the body, but is not derived from it; they too dwell *in* the world, but are not *of it*. The immortal soul dwells in a mortal tent; Christians, too, inhabit dwellings that are perishable, whilst they look for the imperishable in the heavens.' Christians of the nineteenth century, must ye cast down your eyes ashamed before such Christians of the second century?

'We have here no continuing city, but we seek one to come.' It is a powerful representation which is expressed in these words, but at the same time there exists between the condition and the destiny here indicated a natural and invaluable *bond of union*. On the one side, it points out the want of something enduring on earth to which the heart can thus ardently attach itself, as though it were to us prophetic of the future and eternal. On the other side, the knowledge and search after the future is suited more than anything else, not merely to reconcile us with the fleeting nature of all that surrounds us, but, moreover, to raise us permanently above ourselves. Unhappy is that man who only experiences the truth of the first half of the text, without his eyes being opened to the value of the second; yet not less worthy of condemnation the Christian who says that he reckons on a future city as on a certain inheritance, but who all too soon abandons the earnest search after heavenly things

as his great life-task. Alas! the history of many might be contained in these words: 'We have here no continuing city, and we forget that there is one to come.' How good is it that we this day gradually pass from the circle of Easter into that of Pentecost, and, without quite losing sight of the empty tomb of the Saviour, behold as from afar the Mount of Ascension! Let it in the distance now sound forth: 'Lift up your hearts;' and may the grace of God give us as calmly and joyfully to look from the city which is not continuing to that which is, as erewhile did the pious Monica the mother of Augustine, who is immortalized in the Evangelical calendar in connection with this day, and who, in bidding farewell to her best beloved, said: 'As for me, my son, nothing in this life has longer charms for me. What I do here, and why I should longer remain here, I know not. I had but one wish, and it God has abundantly granted me. Bury me where thou wilt, for nowhere am I far from God.' Let us die the death of this righteous one, and let our latter end be like hers!



FOURTH MAY.

'If am a stranger with Thee.'—Ps. xxxix. 12.

HOW the same thing may appear in quite a different light, according to the standpoint from which it is viewed, and the eye which regards it! To be a stranger in the land in which one has been for some time conversant; not quite at home in the circle in which one constantly moves; exposed to many privations, disappointments, changes;—certainly this is in itself no pleasing idea, especially when we compare it with a peaceful and permanent home. And yet how easily the feelings become reconciled to the thought of being

strangers, when faith comprehends and can repeat the words of the pious psalmist, probably David, when he exclaims: 'I am a stranger with Thee.' So we hear him pray, perhaps in that period when, driven from his throne and kingdom, he fled from the face of Absalom; but also later, at the close of his life and the summit of his glory, we hear him make this avowal: 'We are strangers before Thee, and sojourners: our days on earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding' (1 Chron. xxix. 15). Nay, certainly, no abiding of anything or any one but God; nevertheless, he who like the believers of the Old Covenant may feel himself a stranger beside God, has least of all cause of complaint. A happy *meeting* awaits him in the land where he is a stranger, more beautiful and encouraging than the traveller can hope for in his journey even through the loveliest regions; having trust in God and fellowship with Him, he finds Him everywhere, both far and near, His countenance beaming with glory, and His hands overflowing with blessing. Faithful *protection* he may hope for, because the stranger in the East, who has entered the open tent of his entertainer, knows that this last will answer for his rest and safety if need be with his life, and will not suffer any of his enemies to harm one hair of his head. 'The Lord shut him in;' thus it is said of Noah when he had entered the ark; thus may it be said of the wanderer upon earth who has made the good choice: 'I will abide in Thy tabernacle for ever.' And what *refreshing* he who is God's stranger may find in secret, when the friendly host receives him, and listens to him, and lets him hear the 'rest a little' so sweet to the weary and toilworn! The pious writer of the *Picture Gallery for the Home-Sick*, Ulysses von Salis, sketches in an ingenious story the privilege of a traveller severely tried, but to whom some grains of life-balsam had been given, the use of which at once restored him when about to faint from

anxiety and exhaustion; this is the emblem of what every believer carries about with him in the spirit of prayer. 'He restoreth my soul;' the feature suits well with the picture of the good Shepherd, who like the host is altogether without peer. First he is received, then enjoys refreshment; the traveller's staff resumed, God's stranger has still from day to day reason to hope for the most careful *guidance*. The host does not permit him to set forth alone, but goes himself with him on every new track, and grasps his hand at every steep ascent, and holds him firmly when he totters on the brink of an abyss. Nay, such a stranger has no need to ask in fear if and by what means he shall gain his journey's end; certain of God, he is at the same time assured of a blessed *destiny*. God's stranger cannot perish, straying in the valley of the shadow of death, without being more heard of or seen. To him who lives in fellowship with Him, the Infinite imparts of His own immortality; the wanderer has a fatherland, the weary a resting-place, and he who was here God's stranger, becomes a member of His household.

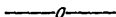
What then? if these things are true here below in regard to the most sorrowful, what, on the other hand, may be termed the most blessed? Sad is it, assuredly, when the worldly-minded man does not even feel himself a stranger; sadder still when he feels himself a stranger, but without God; because to him, certainly through his own fault, the boldness of faith and the vaunt of hope are lacking. But happy, on the other hand, he who, like the psalmist, perhaps through the sorrows of life, has learnt to cry unto God, 'Hold not Thy peace at my tears, *for I* am a stranger with Thee.' Such a stranger is much rather to be envied than lamented; for, more fortunate even than David, he may proceed and pray (ver. 13), not, 'Turn Thou from me,' but, 'Turn Thou to me, that I may recover strength,

before I go hence ;' and for him who believes in Christ there cannot for one moment be mention made of 'and be no more.' Yet a little while and he is with God, as he never was before, but now no more a stranger.

Happy who wait, they patience learn ;
Is not fruit bud and flower in turn ?

Happy who grieve, they shall be glad ;
Spring after winter, their time each had.

Happy who hope, though with tottering feet ;
They yet reach heaven, where all joys meet.



FIFTH MAY.

'And Enoch walked with God ; and he was not, for God took him.'—
GEN. v. 24.

LIFE is made manifest : thus everything now cries to us in a thousand, thousand voices, both in the kingdom of nature and that of grace. Standing between the empty grave and the beautiful Mount of Olivet, we see the light of life continually shine more brightly on us ; can it be otherwise, than that with more than common interest our eye is directed to that point of time in the history of mankind, when a first ray of light from the hope of eternal life brightened the clouds of sin and death ? It gleams upon us in that which is written concerning the pious Enoch in the oldest bill of mortality extant. Or could the mysterious narrative of his removal from earth absolutely mean nothing more than that he in an extraordinarily gentle manner, as at a later period was the case with Moses, fell asleep at a word from the Lord ? But the Epistle to the Hebrews at least does not favour such an interpretation ; it says (xi. 5), in so many words, 'Enoch was translated that he should not

see death ; and was not found, because God had translated him ;' and already the distinction between the translation and the death recorded of all the rest makes us surmise not merely something mysterious, but, moreover, marvellous and glorious. God, it is here sufficiently evident, has, in regard to Enoch, made a first and most remarkable exception to the sentence passed upon Adam and all his sons, and has taken this God-fearing man whilst comparatively young, in what manner is not mentioned, up to Himself in heaven, without causing him to pass through death. To Enoch himself this translation was the crown of a walk in fellowship with God in the midst of a deeply corrupt generation ; the compensation for all the struggle and reproach which undoubtedly came upon him on account of his faithful testimony ; the passage to a paradise more beautiful than ought here below had been opened to him. For his contemporaries, the occurrence was an impressive revelation of the existence, the omniscience, and the holiness of God, which were constantly becoming more and more forgotten ; of the eternal separation between those who serve God and those who serve Him not ; of the life and immortality especially to be expected after departure from this world. Thus a brighter ray of light falls on the problem of life and death from the grey clouds already big with the waters of the flood ; and, as in flaming letters, was written by God's finger, before the eyes of the old world, ' I live, and ye too are immortal.'

But this same translation of Enoch, in connection with his God-glorifying life, does it not retain its value for all succeeding ages ? nay, is it not of significance for our faith and life ? Yea, verily, ' mark the perfect man, and consider the upright ; for the end of that man is peace.' Still, after so many centuries, it stands as though interlined, *No cross, no crown.* Of Enoch, indeed, we know, that he not only walked with God as a friend with his

friend, but that he also as a prophet stood forth boldly against the transgression of his age (Jude 14, 15). Nay, it is not easy, especially in a season of unbelief and spiritual decline, to hold firm by God; and as an apostle terms it, 'to shine as lights in the world, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.' Enochs and Noahs have been at all times relatively scarce, and they are gradually becoming more so. But yet that which is difficult becomes possible for those who have really seen God in the face of Christ, and have laid the hand of faith unconditionally in His. The path may be toilsome, but the wayfarer is never to be commiserated, because he has the best of guides, and the end compensates a thousandfold what he has suffered at the beginning and throughout its course. *No cross without a crown*: the voice of this forerunner in faith and obedience cries to us as expressly as it did before the converse of the saying. God is a rewarder of all those who seek Him: a book of memorial is kept by Him, in which are written all the names of His own people; and whatever here on earth is withheld or taken from them, the Heavens shall repay with usury. Yet let it never be forgotten, none are crowned but they who have striven lawfully; and only they who endure to the end shall be saved. In order, like Enoch, but in a higher sense, not to see death, we must already here have chosen the way of life, worshipped the Prince of life, been built and firmly established on the sure hope of life. Blessed is he who, like Enoch before his translation, has witness that he pleased God! Even though he lay on his deathbed, he shall not see death, but life; and he can, until the hour comes, go on his way rejoicing, the psalm of faith within his soul: 'Thou shalt guide me by Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me into glory?'

SIXTH MAY.

'My soul cleaveth to the dust: quicken Thou me according to Thy word.'—
Ps. cxix. 25.

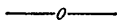
'LOOK up now to the heavens:' so once spake the Lord to Abraham His friend; and to us too, to-day especially, this voice sounds ever in the ear. Alas! why must it be so always; when we come to know ourselves even but a little, we are constantly answered with the mournful sigh, 'My soul cleaveth to the dust'? Ah! that is indeed the *deepest pain* of a soul which has already tasted that the Lord is merciful, when, although desiring to soar on high, it sadly feels how impossible it is to rise. There is much hidden pain in every heart of man even in the spiritual life, but what can deeper grieve than the perception that we are chained as with leaden weights to things concerning which we know that they may weary but cannot satisfy us? Nay, we could never have supposed, when we first heard the psalm of the Good Shepherd, that it should issue from the heart that panteth after God so often and so bitterly; we could never have imagined that it could become so cold, so dry, so dark within a heart which at an earlier period had tasted so much of the power of that which is to come. Have we not formerly, with this same psalm, been able to vaunt, 'I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, as much as in all riches'? But afterwards, but now perhaps . . . Oh sad hours, when of the sun within the beams seem quenched, and nothing but a blood-red disc remains! The fervency of the first love is cooled; earthly cares and sins have, as it were, attached a leaden plummet to the wings of a soul which, God knows, would fain soar upwards. We would render thanks, and scarce can pray; we would pray,

and scarce can sigh. Our treasure is in heaven, but our soul cleaves to the earth; at least earth cleaves on all sides so to it, and weighs it down, that the eye merely sees the clouds, the tongue can but breathe forth complaints. Ah, so completely can the earth fetter us, that the heavens appear to be only a problem, and our old man is like the Giant of Mythology, who, in the exhausting combat cast to the ground, receives by contact with his mother earth fresh strength. Oh, were it otherwise! Shall it not at last, at last be altered!

Dost thou really desire it, thou who out of the depths of thy soul so complainest, and canst scarcely find more tears to bewail the sorrow of thy heart? Well is it for thee if the pain thou sufferest teach thee to cry to God: 'Quicken Thou me, according to Thy word.' Yea, this is the *best comfort* for him who too well knows what it is to be bowed together with pain; this is the only hope for a heart which almost sinks in still despair. There is an *atmosphere* of life, high above this dust, which streams to us from every side, and penetrates even the darkest dungeon. There is a *spring* of life by which the weary soul may be refreshed; and the entrance to this spring stands open, in spite of all the clouds of dust which obscure this valley of shadows here. There is a *power* of life which can even so completely make an end of our dead state, that we shall walk again before the face of the Lord in the land of the living, and in place of sad lamentation, with a song of praise upon our lips. Does not the Prince of life yet live in order also to repeat to us, 'Awake and rejoice, thou that dwellest in the dust;' and the Spirit, that bloweth whither it listeth, can, will, shall He not in His own good time, with His living breath, blow from our wings the dust that cleaveth to them? But, indeed, even the gnawing pain of the soul over so much want of spirituality and dulness is ever an encouraging sign that the good work is begun

in our hearts ; that which is really dead shivers no more at its own cold. 'My soul cleaveth to the dust,' sayest thou, with tears ; thus wouldest thou not speak except that already a higher hand between the soul and this dust had cleft a hollow which was unknown to it before. No one has less cause for despair than he who has lost hope in himself, and really learns to seek with God that, which he deeply feels, he least of all can give himself.

Yes, this is *the way* from the deepest pain to procure the best consolation ; the humble, earnest, persevering prayer, that He who lives would also give life to our souls, and continue to increase it, till freed from all dryness and deadness of spirit, and unrooted from the earth, we ascend to the eternal mount of light, where at last we behold all earthly clouds beneath us. This the God of life alone can work ; but He is willing—nay, we have His own word as pledge, that He promises and bestows on us true life. Only, let us not forget that He who will quicken us *according* to His word, also performs this *through* His word. Let us then draw from out the eternally-flowing fountain, and henceforth leave it unconditionally to Him, how He will listen to our cry, even though He lead us through dark paths ! Even through means of death God can quicken us and keep us alive . . . ; lo, we are here ; Lord, do with us as seemeth good to Thee ! *Only*, let our souls live, that they may praise Thee, here and eternally !



SEVENTH MAY.

'Whitherto have ye asked nothing in my name : ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.'—JOHN xvi. 24.

THERE is no complaint so common in many spiritual lives as the complaint of unanswered prayer : there is no doubt which has penetrated so deeply and so per-

niciously as the doubt of the power and of the result of fervent and persevering prayer. That men through supplication are elevated, strengthened, brought into a happier frame of mind in the dark hours, is readily admitted ; but that in and through prayer they obtain from God Himself that which otherwise they would not obtain, appears to numbers to be incredible, and especially at variance with the experience of many suppliants. Would it not be good, opposed to a seeming wisdom like this which would finally make every visit to the inner chamber of prayer an act of superstition, to inquire seriously concerning the *demand* of the Lord, coupled with His positive *promise*, and strengthened by the happiest *prospect* ?

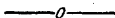
‘Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name ;’ thus He speaks before His departure to His faithful disciples. It is thus evident that men like these Galileans at that moment, upright before God and devout in heart, may be far from strangers or unexercised in the school of prayer, without their petitions attaining the mark which alone can bear the name of truly Christian, and which is here indicated as a higher step in the inner life. This prayer in the name of Jesus was first to have place whenever He Himself should be exalted to heaven, in order to become their advocate with the Father, and they through the power of the Holy Spirit should be brought into closest fellowship with Him in His glorified condition. It is not easy to give an explanation of the demand to pray in *Jesus’ name*, which shall be in all respects satisfactory. There can be no attempt at this, unless where the name of Jesus is the object of a living faith, the sphere, the element of life, the centre in which the suppliant places himself before God’s holy face. The name of Jesus is then regulating and decisive as regards the *foundation*, *contents*, *spirit*, and *aim* of prayer. He who goes to the Father in Jesus’ name thereby declares,

for instance, that in his own name he would not dare to approach ; but that he borrows his boldness in coming, not from anything in himself, not even from anything in God out of Christ, but only from the merits of the Saviour, on whom the eye of faith is fixed, and with whom He is most intimately united. He who thus prays, asks therefore for no other gifts, either spiritual or temporal, than such as a disciple of Christ may boldly ask of the Father ; he does it in that spirit of childlike faith and unreserved obedience which he has learnt of the Son ; he does it with no other object than in order that, through the answering of his prayer, the name of God may be more glorified.

But now is there still need of stating that such a prayer cannot possibly remain unheard, yea, even if we lacked the positive *promise*: 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you,' should we have power to doubt its efficacy? But, indeed, we know the Father loves the Son ; and the sinner who comes exclusively with an appeal to this holy and precious name cannot possibly meet a refusal, however much he may himself deserve it. What such a suppliant asks, is in principle the same that the Father specially desires to give ; his disposition is well-pleasing to God ; his aim materially no other than that both of creation and redemption. Although the manner *in which* prayer shall be answered has something in it perfectly inscrutable, yet, to deny that God can, and in His own time will answer it, must lead to absolute absurdity. And who can reckon up the experiences of Christ's disciples, living and already dead, who to these promises have appended such a seal of perfect faithfulness as makes us sink in speechless adoration of God's marvellous doings ! Ah ! if fewer failed to pray aright in the name of Jesus, there would be less lack of prayer unanswered, which here below only begun is perfected

above. But it is known to God alone how many, who call themselves disciples, the good Master might thus reprove: 'Hitherto ye have asked nothing;' and how many others who yet cannot live without the Father deserve this rebuke: 'Hitherto have ye asked nothing *in my name.*' Such a mode of prayer men learn not from flesh and blood,—nay, not from the necessities of life,—but only through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Ah, that we at last might better learn to prize the enchanting prospect here opened to us through Jesus, and could contemplate it no longer in the far distance! 'That your joy may be full!' Joy perfect, without flaw, where is the heart that can imagine this and not glow with desire? For one drop of joy men would travel hours; and a stream of it is pointed out by the finger of the Saviour no further off than the threshold of the closet set apart for prayer. *Perfect* joy; yea, we perceive this must become our portion if this promise is to be fulfilled. Well, then, faithful is He that hath promised, and He desires nothing more than that we seriously should prove if the long-sought secret is not finally to be found in this path. The result can be reckoned on beforehand.



EIGHTH MAY.

'Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?'—LUKE xxiv. 26.

SUFFERING and glory—can there, for the sensual eye, be a distance greater than this? The manger and Mount Tabor; Golgotha and Mount Olivet; the Church of martyrs under the cross, and the company of the redeemed before the throne, with palms in their hands and the new song on the lips: what a contrast!

And yet, where so often our feeling only speaks of a painful contrast, there the eye of faith soon discovers an indispensable connection; and it was no less than the Saviour Himself who called the attention of His unbelieving disciples to a divine *must*, by which, even in regard to Him, no exception could be made, at least, unless God's fixed decree should be violently broken. Nay, even the incarnate Son of God cannot be glorified until He had first here below learned perfect obedience to His Father; and this lesson is never better understood than in the school of suffering.

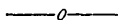
But this is valid, too, of all His people: through suffering to glory; and to eternity this remains the fundamental law under which we live on earth, 'that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God' (Acts xiv. 22). Thus was it throughout all succeeding ages; thus is it now for all who will follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth; yea, on consideration, we perceive it can, it must, not be otherwise. Nay, *suffering trains for glory*. Is there, in the case of the best Christian who knows himself saved by the grace of God, so infinitely much to be acquired, and not less to be unlearned and laid aside, in order that he may in any degree be made fit for the inheritance of the saints in light,—nothing is for both of these purposes of more blessed power than the suffering of this present time. Even in the region of nature and of social life we see no progress and elevation except through labour and struggle. The luxuriance of May is born of the cold shivering of April; and no one commonly succeeds better than he who, as the saying is, has for a time 'to make his way through the thicket.' But specially in the kingdom of God, all that is destined to greatness is for the most part won by losing. God deals with His chosen ones as the diamond-polisher with the precious stone which he handles so that the dust is separated from it on all sides, but only

that thus it may shine the brightest jewel in a kingly crown. Through suffering with Christ the will becomes weaned from worldly lusts; tears brighten the eye to view more clearly things invisible; the thorn in the flesh becomes an incentive to prayer, and that prayer is not in vain.

Suffering is changed into glory, even as the shadow is swallowed up in light, and death in life. Thus with Christ the first-fruit, for whom Golgotha was not merely the way, but the guarantee and pledge of the Bethany of glorification, and of the day of His return in triumph. The eye of the enraptured John saw in the heavenly Feast of Tabernacles (Rev. vii. 9-17) a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues; but on the question, 'Who are these, and whence came they?' the answer was for all the same: 'These are they which came out of great tribulation.' But now what a change! The sword is exchanged for the palm branch, the lamentation for the song of praise, the mourning garment for the robe of spotless white, washed in the blood of the Lamb; and whilst the joyful host gives thanks for many things, certainly for nought more fervently than that they have been led to the brilliant heights above along no smoother path.

Indeed, we can already see from afar that *suffering heightens the enjoyment of the glory* which shall be revealed. For, shines not the spring the brighter because born of the snows of winter? is not the mother's joy the sweeter because of the pangs that went before it? should Christ's crown have seemed so glorious had it not been won by the way of the cross, and the psalm of the redeemed? could it have risen to such a pitch of triumph, if here below the dirge of lamentation had not so long rung out its plaintive notes? Nay, we have not merely reason to acquiesce submissively in the

linking together of suffering and glory, but, moreover, abundant cause to thank the highest love for this disposal. Glorious gospel, which lets fall so comforting a light in the dark depths. Glad prospect for so many, who here daily sow with tears, yet as certainly may count upon a harvest with rejoicing! How holy our vocation! if we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified with Him! Not our sufferings, however, but His alone, open the way for us to heaven; but after Jesus, we cannot enter otherwise than with the cross upon our shoulders. Cross-bearer, be then in truth knight of the cross: knight of the cross, shame not thy liege Lord thus ever to press forward with bowed head!



NINTH MAY.

'Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted.'—MATT. xxviii. 16, 17.

THE more the forty days haste to a close, the more begin also the revelations of the risen Lord in the midst of His followers to assume the character of approaching farewell. This is very evidently the case with the appearance on the mountain in Galilee, which we may say the first morning of Easter had already promised, and which successive revelations did not make superfluous, but rather prepared for. Frequently it is brought forward against the truth of the miracle of the ascension, that the Apostle Matthew does not expressly mention it. But certainly the appearance with which he closes his Gospel compensates almost completely for this lack, and throws an ineffable ascension of glory over the narrative. In all probability we have here the recital of the farewell greeting of the Lord to the large

circle of His disciples shortly before His departure,—the same appearance to more than five hundred of the brethren at once, of which Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xv. 6), which forms one of the firmest supports of our most holy faith in the miracle of the resurrection, and of which it would be almost inconceivable, if it were entirely passed over by the evangelists. Moment never to be forgotten, when all were assembled whom the Lord had previously appointed to meet Him on a mountain,—perhaps Mount Tabor,—and who now beheld Him in His glory! Decisive hour for the history of God's kingdom upon earth, when there, in solemn stillness, the first-fruit of them that slept received the worship of His earliest followers, and gave that commission to His apostles, which, although they themselves had no suspicion of it, was to decide the religious future of the whole world! But, moreover, to us 'on whom the ends of the earth are come,' how is this mountain hallowed, as frequently as we turn our thoughts thitherwards—a mountain of *manifestation* in the highest sense of the term!

Here is revealed before our eyes the glory of *God*, in so far as it can be known to us, as it meets us in the now unveiled gospel of atonement and sanctification. Even before His departure from earth there was heard, from the lips of Jesus Himself, the threefold name which shall immediately be manifested among all peoples, which in baptism is invoked on the head of each of us, and the God for us, God with us, God in us becomes from that hour thenceforward the highest vaunt of faith.

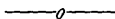
Here is revealed not less the glory of *Christ*, the anointed Sovereign of the kingdom of God, who now on the threshold of His throne turns round, as it were, to give a decisive answer to the great question: 'Who art Thou?' 'To me is given all power in heaven and

on earth.' What a declaration from the lips of Him who at an earlier period declared that He sought not His own honour; and what a matter was signified through these words! Nothing less is intimated than an absolutely unlimited dominion over the territories of matter and spirit, from which nothing and no one is excepted but He alone, to whom all things are subject. Either this declaration is insanity or it is truth, which elevates Him of whom it speaks above the rank of men and angels.

But thus is revealed also in this appearance the glory of *God's kingdom* before our wondering eyes in a light of resplendent brightness. God Himself has willed and appointed that all should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. Not to a single people, but to all peoples without exception this extends: it brings to all the same benefits, but claims also from all the same obedience. It comes often unmarked by the eye of sense, like the appearance on the mountain, remains concealed from the eye of the world; but it also triumphs over the most obstinate resistance, because the King did not depart till He had uttered this great saying: 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' Alway,—but thus then all days are days of the Lord; thus there can never be question for one moment of want of refuge for His people on His side; thus the eternal nearness of the Sovereign to His kingdom is not less guaranteed than its eternal duration.

Who can think of this without the Mount of Manifestation becoming for him changed into a mountain of *adoration*? The eleven already worshipped the Lord before they had heard these words,—we may do so more deeply after we not merely have heard, but also have beheld their ample fulfilment in such countless instances. Or, should we range ourselves along with the 'some' who, we read, 'doubted'? Yet the doubt

certainly could never rest upon the truth of Jesus' resurrection, or the claim of His person to adoration, but only the question if this glorified One were really the Master. Soon all hesitation disappeared like to the clouds before the sun; and a doubt which then was explicable, should it not now be inexcusable? Nay, nowhere else but in the dust before the feet of this King is the position that befits His subjects. But then, moreover, to arise in order truly, even from to-day, henceforth to maintain *all* that He gave command to His disciples, and to press forward at His word to that mountain of transcendent beauty, where He has appointed to meet the completed circle of His friends, and where He shall appear to them in His full glory. May none of us be wanting there!



TENTH MAY.

'After that He was seen of James.'—I COR. xv. 7.

AMONGST all the appearances of the risen Lord, there is certainly none which at first sight draws less attention, and even on express consideration captivates us less, than that to James, mentioned by Paul alone. Much less interesting does it seem than the special manifestation to Cephas, and yet it is certainly not less significant for the steadfastness of our faith and the guidance of our Christian life. Most probably the James here meant is the same who wrote the general Epistle, the brother of the Lord, held in high honour in the Apostolic Church, greeted by the surname of the Just, and put to death as a martyr to the unbelief of the hostile Jews. He was thus one of those brethren who at one time did not believe on Jesus (John vii. 5), but in all likelihood was brought to the faith by means of this

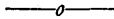
interview with Him. From the mention of this appearance, after that to the five hundred brethren, and before that to all the apostles,—which last would seem to have taken place on the fortieth day itself,—it has been inferred, not without reason, that this manifestation of the risen Lord took place not long before His departure, and was perhaps made in silent preparation for the meeting of all the apostles on the morning of the ascension. How does it here place before us, in the most amiable light, the Saviour who repays the life-long misjudgment of His brethren after the flesh, by a special revelation to the eldest of them !

What then took place between Him and James is surrounded with the veil of secrecy ; enough : he casts the honest doubter down at His feet, and forthwith causes him to arise as witness of His resurrection. At that moment James, the kingdom of God, nay, heaven itself made a conquest, all the import of which can but be surmised. It is only a solitary ray of the Resurrection Sun which here gladdens our vision, but even by this misty light steps forth again to view the form of the glorified Redeemer ; and it is permitted us to see how He treats doubters when these are upright in heart. The appearance to James shows us that Christ *thinks on* such not less than on His further advanced, assured friends, and has thus a heart also for those whose eyes are not yet opened to His greatness and love. Not only Peter the penitent sinner, but also James the honest doubter, He sought out in their solitude, and He lives in order to lead them to the full enjoyment of truth and life. He *wins* those who thus grope about in twilight, if only they have a sincere desire after higher light in the soul. He who deliberately *will* not believe, ends, alas, by not *being able* to believe ; yet—as we see in the case of James—to the upright ariseth light in the darkness. Long had this brother of

the Lord wrestled with prejudice and doubt; at the appearance to the five hundred, apparently he was not present; he is one of the last witnesses of the resurrection, yet shall be among the first of these. At all events the Lord transforms him into one of His chosen servants, —servant of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory; this is now in his estimation a title of honour, possessed of which he can endure all loss. Yea, verily, also with James after this appearance all old things are passed away, and, behold, all is become new. What liberality is shown afterwards in the speech which he made at the first meeting of the Church at Jerusalem (Acts xv.)! what strong faith in the Epistle which he afterwards addresses to the twelve tribes scattered abroad! what conformity to the likeness of his glorified Brother in his whole life, sufferings, and death, with a prayer on his lips for his murderers, under whose sharp stones he sinks down bruised and lifeless!

This was brought about to James by this manifestation. And has not the living Christ acted in the same way to the many millions who, at first unbelieving, have learnt to know Him in the power of His resurrection? Will He not glorify the same grace and power by all of us whom He now sees stand, even as James before the appearance, at a distance from Himself and His gospel, but with the silent desire in the heart that they were able to believe? Inestimable consolation for so many in our day, especially, whose understandings are darkened by prejudice, whose hearts are torn by conflict, whose life is not indeed in Christ, but much less can be found and maintained without Him! Oh, ye who have found Him, or rather who through His mercy have been found, boast and rejoice in Him who thus can lead the hidden struggle to a blessed end, and follow ye His holy footsteps, whenever ye in your turn come in contact with the tossed in spirit and doubtful! Be not harsh, dispute not, do not

despair of their being brought to a right frame of mind; but bear with them, seek to win them, if possible, by the display of quiet affection; behold in this your holy vocation! He who is honestly in earnest will sooner or later be certain to meet with Christ, and through your prayer it shall finally be their history also: 'after that He was seen of James.'



ELEVENTH MAY.

'Beginning at Jerusalem.'—LUKE xxiv. 47.

'THE words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.' This is true not only of the words of the Lord in His state of humiliation, but also of those which have been preserved for us from His glorified life; especially of the last, which He gave forth shortly before His departure, and to which we are never weary of listening with deepest reverence. 'Give me three lines of a man's writing,' says some one, 'and I have sufficient to form a judgment of his character.' Give me three words of the Lord's utterance, we might almost repeat, with an eye on to-day's text, and I will show you therein the whole character of Christ.

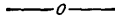
What striking memories are associated with these words! It calls up before our spirit of itself that solemn hour, in which the risen Lord already stands at the foot of the mount of glorification, and in calm majesty gives to His apostles the commission which is to determine not merely the future task of their lives, but, moreover, the eternal salvation of the sinful world. 'In His name should be preached repentance and remission of sins among all nations,' and not merely with the inclusion of that city, but, 'beginning at Jerusalem,' the very place which but a few weeks before witnessed His shameful

death upon the cross. What must have passed within the hearts of the eleven, who, on hearing this command, felt laid upon their shoulders a burden almost too heavy for human strength to bear; but at the same time were permitted a glance into the Master's soul, which certainly, at least from John, was calculated to draw forth the exclamation, 'It is the Lord'? Little dreamt the bloody city, as it there in the early morning lay slumbering at His feet, what undeserved benefit, in a single word, was shown to thousands of her citizens, to whom was thus opened the entrance to the Church, which should save them from eternal ruin. But we, who view this passage by the light of the result,—we see here a revelation of truth and mercy vouchsafed us, worthy our deepest admiration. A revelation first of *Christ*, who here stands forth anew before us as the Friend and Saviour of sinners, the majestic sovereign of God's kingdom, the Son of the living God, both in love and holiness the express image of the Father. But it is, moreover, a revelation of not less surpassing value of the *gospel*, so often ungratefully despised. Who can doubt its truth, who reflects that His apostles, so shortly after the death of the Lord, nowhere else than in Jerusalem, commence the preaching of the miracle of the resurrection? Who does not see here the argument and extent of the gospel written down as it were in a few words before the eyes of all future generations—redemption and regeneration even for the bitterest foes, the most deeply sunk of the children of God? Yea, who can despair of its final triumph who sees it begin indeed at Jerusalem, but not at Jerusalem yield and terminate? And along with all this, the glory of the *kingdom of God* now beams before us in a light at which the lustre of all earthly glory fades into nothing. In this, indeed, we see again that the ways of God are infinitely broad and deep. Who, that so shortly before

had heard the streets of Jerusalem resound with the fierce cry of 'Crucify him, crucify him!' would ever have surmised that there, by choice, the cradle of God's kingdom yet should stand! But almost at the same time the truth of God's word strikes and amazes us; indeed, what the Lord here ordains is in strict harmony with what already centuries before the voice of the prophets had predicted regarding Jerusalem's special destiny. Yea, the sublimity of God's greatest work—the work of redemption—appears anew to us, where thus the Old Covenant and the New are as by His own hand bound together, and the Gentile world are blessed; without from the ungrateful descendants of His friend God withdrawing His gift of grace, or forgetting the covenant of His promise. Even the past is here a prophecy for the future, and at the end the circle turns back to its point of issue; the fulness of the Gentiles is admitted, and thus, too, shall all Israel be saved.

What a powerful *summons* is here contained in a few words, apparently so simple and yet so inexhaustibly rich, both for the foes and friends of Christ and of His gospel! Thou who deniest Him, what shall strike thee, if so much love and greatness leaves thee cold? And thou who knowest Him, what vocation can be holier to thee than to be His obedient, happy, and faithful witness, each in his special sphere? Only let all of us begin in His name and power at what is nearest to us; first, at that Jerusalem of sin within, that through the power of this gospel must be entirely reformed and renewed; thereafter, at the sinful Jerusalem around us, in our own household, and circle, and country, and Church; and let us do it with a perseverance which shall unweariedly spread forth into wider circles. The Lord has shown His servants at what point they must begin, but not where they must end. The task is unseen, the time for accomplishing it short and uncertain, but the

vocation is so beautiful; and, God be praised, He who issued the commission, and who thus displayed the highest love before His departure from this world, is likewise the Faithful and True, who repeats and fulfils this declaration: 'Lo, I send the promise of my Father upon you!'



TWELFTH MAY.

'And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.'—2 KINGS ii. 11.

NEXT to the narrative of the translation of Enoch, commemorated for ages in this portion of the ecclesiastical year, the inspired account of Elijah's ascent into heaven has attracted attention. No wonder; for, considered only in regard to its beauty, the page which here lies open before us with all its mystery has an attraction which is more easily imagined than described. The silent journey of Elijah and Elisha from Gilgal to Bethel, from Bethel to Jericho, from Jericho to Jordan; the slow preparation, the repeated questioning, the sad asseveration: 'Yea, I know it, hold ye your peace;' and then, when at last the goal is reached, the last permission, the fervent pleading, the conditional assent, the pathetic parting, the soul's outburst: 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof,'—altogether it has for those who read it well, that is to say, who place themselves entirely in the position of speaker and hearer, something so striking as can only be found in the region of the highest revelation. If we consider the peculiar circumstances of Elijah's translation, we perceive that such a mysterious and sublime close to his earthly sojourn, so markedly separated from the ordinary lot of man, was in all respects worthy of God as well as of the prophet of the

desert, and of the sacrifice by fire; and when the eye of our devout imagination sees Elijah's mantle of camel's hair fall to earth, whilst he who wore it as conqueror ascended heavenwards, then ask we not longer with Elisha, 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?' Even in the transparent vesture of the emblem we behold the greatness of His power, the wisdom of His guidance, the truth of His word: 'They that honour me, I will honour;' and we adore His greatness infinitely deeper than the sons of the prophets did when they prostrated themselves before Elijah.

And yet, even when we do not doubt the truth and divine dignity of the translation of Elijah, what is it in splendour and significance compared with the ascension of our Lord, which we ere long shall anew contemplate; and how does every comparison constantly draw from our lips the words: 'Behold, a greater than Elijah is here'? After faithful conflict for the honour of God, Elijah was gloriously crowned; but the strife reached not to blood, and was in no degree free of human weaknesses. Jesus was glorified after He in more desperate struggle had shown perfect obedience unto the death of the cross, and had overcome not merely a godless Ahab, but the whole powers of hell. Elijah ascended in a whirlwind, and entered heaven as in a fiery chariot. Jesus, quite in the spirit of the New Dispensation, as in the rustling of a gentle breeze, is soon received by a cloud and lost to sight: the one bears the same relation to the other as Sinai to the Mount of Beatitude. On the prayer for a double portion of his spirit, the Tishbite, with the perception of the greatness of the matter, durst answer nothing unconditionally: Jesus promises and bestows on all His followers in the largest measure the gifts of the Holy Ghost. If Elijah is glorified, it is in order to set forth what he has here done so thoroughly, and that he may serve God in the midst of the most honoured of heaven's

inhabitants: Jesus was exalted to be a Prince and Saviour in order to reign above, nay, over all principalities and powers. What wonder that, whilst Elisha looked after his translated predecessor with deep pain, and others afterwards, however fruitlessly, still seek traces of him on earth, the disciples of Jesus at the sight of His exaltation were filled with great joy, and thenceforth only expect from heaven what they know that the earth can no more give them! In truth, a greater than Elijah, a more than prophet or reformer of the highest region of life, yea, the Sovereign of God's kingdom, is here!

Oh ye who call yourselves His subjects, regard Him, when shortly hereafter ye contemplate His ascension, with heightened reverence and holy joy, and let the prayer for a twofold portion of His spirit be heard from out the inmost depths of your heart: it shall not be in vain. But go then also, strengthened through this spirit, forth to the conflict of your life, filled with the glad assurance which this page from ancient revelation has awakened: on faithful strife below follows a glorious triumph in the heavens. Let what is earthly, like Elijah's mantle, freely fall from you, even should the separation be perplexing; the lighter the ballast, the quicker the journey. Leave the manner of your departure confidently to God; what matters it to the prophet though in storm and whirlwind He enters heaven? Only have your loins girded; and should your heart, like that of Elisha, be filled with bitter sorrow, draw over the rent garment of your earthly pain the mantle grace bestowed, of heavenly calling, and go bravely forward through the battle to the crown!

THIRTEENTH MAY.

'Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.'—Ps. lxxviii. 18.

MOST probably this powerful and magnificent 68th Psalm was composed when, after the gaining of a victory, the ark of the covenant was brought back to its appointed resting-place upon Mount Zion. Very speedily Christian faith in the footsteps of Paul (Eph. iv. 8) beheld in this elevation of the sanctuary from a condition of former humiliation, an emblem of the exaltation of Christ, and gave to this psalm, along with the 24th and 47th, a conspicuous place among the favourite Ascension hymns of the Church. And, indeed, without venturing into the sphere of sacred music, the harmony between the event commemorated in the days of the Old Dispensation and the crowning festival of the New, is sufficiently remarkable to draw our attention. Although our psalm had been—as it notoriously was not—actually composed on the occasion of the exaltation of our Lord and Saviour, its splendour could scarcely have been more aptly fitted to the circumstances than in the verse of our text. Let us again return to Olivet, the mount of glorification; what shall we see and hear? A *humiliated King glorified*; this first draws our observation. 'Thou hast ascended on high,'—thus exalts the Church from year to year concerning her exalted Lord; yet what was the condition of temporal humiliation in which the ark of the covenant could have been found, compared with all the shame and reproach which was poured forth like water upon the sacred head of the God-man! But now, triumph, hallelujah, triumph! we see Jesus soon again, crowned with glory and honour;

having descended first 'into the lower parts of the earth,' as the apostle declares, that is, into the darker depths of the domain of death, He thereafter ascended gloriously 'far above all heavens,'—can it be more strongly expressed?—'that He might fill all things.'

Now also is *a hostile force disarmed* by Him, in a much higher sense than could ever have been true in regard to the triumphal procession of the ancient sanctuary. 'Thou hast led captivity captive:' askest thou not, Who are the captives whom this Conqueror chains inexorably to His car of victory? But we know this is something more than mere poetic language, when from year to year we sing: 'Sin, the world, death, and hell, are all Thy captives:' in His own hand He bears the keys of death and the tomb, which powerless yield before His omnipotence. What a representation for well-assured belief!—all my spiritual foes overcome, disarmed, exposed, so that I have no more to do than to set forth the victory of Christ, and share in its joy! Many things are hopeless on this earth, but there is no case so desperate as that of the kingdom of darkness, because its king feels already the Conqueror's foot upon his neck, and only still breathes, because Christ suffers him to live.

Fearful prospect for the foes, but at the same time bright consolation for the subjects of God's kingdom; ever they behold an *ample gift bestowed on them*, which justifies the exulting song: 'Thou hast received gifts for men.' Was it customary at triumphal processions in the East to bestow on the needy, from the spoil obtained, presents on a princely scale of abundance?—who can adequately describe the magnificence of the benefits dealt out by the exalted Saviour, and the munificence with which He distributes these to all who approach His throne of grace with empty hands but earnest hearts? Here if anywhere is the passage applicable

concerning the 'good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over' (Luke vi. 38), which shall be given into the bosom of the children of the kingdom. With all spiritual blessings from heaven we are blessed in Christ, and what has already rejoiced millions, is still in the future appointed for millions more; yea, the greater the necessity, the richer the fulfilment here promised. Ah! how much they err who maintain that the gospel of the kingdom is only suited for little minds and narrow hearts; nay, just the truly great, and wise, and upward struggling can least of all exist without Christ and His benefits. For earth and all that dwell therein there is secured in Him the amplest satisfaction, and for heaven . . . ? But with our psalmist we see finally a *spacious dwelling opened* at the glorious departure of Him who was indeed exalted 'for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.' Before the eye of the poet the prospect seems to unfold, that the still rebellious nations should be so struck by the fame of God's great deeds, that they should come to seek and to find bliss in His tabernacle on Zion. But we, who already stand at the foot of the Mount of Ascension, can look still higher and further, and meditate on greater bliss in a more glorious tabernacle; and if we are not too proud to take our place amongst those who were once rebellious, we may then without presumption seek it among the future blessed ones.

Thus the conclusion of all is Christ's coronation, Christ's exalted glory; and now, can it be otherwise if we read and sing two verses further in believing adoration, but, moreover, in joyful confidence? 'Blessed be the Lord,' ye know the rest. May it least of all be wanting in our heart and life!

FOURTEENTH MAY.

'*En my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.*'—JOHN xiv. 2.

THE gospel teaches us to consider the departure of the Lord from the earth from many interesting points of view; but is there a passage in Scripture which transcends in beauty and power His farewell to His disciples, in which, when just about to leave them, He seeks to reconcile them to His departure? It is the last evening before His death, but with the solicitude of love a veil is thrown over all which would prematurely shock their feelings and imaginations; and, on the other hand, the subject of their sadness is represented to them as a cause of reasonable joy, which after His glorification should permanently endure, nay, increase. He indeed goes hence, but He journeys by the cross to the throne, out of the land of the stranger to the house of the Father, where He, as the Son, belongs to the household; to a house, but with many mansions, where He will await His friends and prepare all for their arrival, and then when the time comes He will Himself bring them in thither, in order that they may thenceforth dwell with Him for ever. Oh, even now we hear a beautiful allegory; the Lord from heaven Himself cannot on earth speak other than in figures and parables of the unseen and the future; but who does not perceive with sufficient clearness what this emblem signifies, and will not term this parting word of the Saviour a glorious gospel for His true disciples? How much does it contain for all who pay attention, which may be read as though it were there interlined!

There is a heavenly home, *our Father's house*: the positive assurance of this truth which we have here from

Him who Himself came down to earth from heaven, nay, who while on earth yet never ceased to be in heaven, has something in it which imperceptibly attracts and elevates. A house, a fixed habitation in contrast to the fleeting and perishable nature of all in and around us: a home, where the wanderer finds rest when he returns weary and toilworn from the stranger's land, and may expect a cordial welcome: a house with many mansions, so that in no case shall there be wanting space, diversity to harmonize with all varieties of need and capacity;—who feels surprise at this when lifting his moist eyes to the sparkling circle of the stars, in which the lights of our Father's house already glimmer in the distance?

And further still does He assure them, who is even less a stranger in that house than He is in the hearts of His friends, where, though still invisible to them, He is no longer wholly hidden. There is a *Friend* in that house who never ceases to think of them, even when for a longer or shorter period He has vanished from their bodily sight; who on high is not idle, but active, active for their real and as yet future interests; who does not long less ardently to see them beside Him, than they to be with Him. 'To prepare a place for you:' let it remain unfixed wherein this special preparation consists, not merely of His people for the place, but of the place for them, since in the main all things required for their salvation were finished on the cross; yet it is a glorious representation, that as on our entrance into this world all was already prepared for us by the anticipation of love, so the redeemed on entering heaven shall find himself not an unexpected, far less an unwelcome guest, but shall at once feel that he is at home, because that evidently all has been got ready for his perfect enjoyment. 'Before thy pilgrimage began, thy festal robe lay ready spun.'

Or should it be possible, where so many have already gone before, that there should lack space for more? Yet there is *room* in heaven, reply the lips of Truth, when the Lord so expressly speaks of 'many' mansions; if it were not so, He would have told us, He who never deceives any of His people with false hopes? Many mansions: it is often said that the enlightenment of modern times has deprived us of the idea of a local heaven; with greater justice it might be said, that just the knowledge of the immensity of the universe brought us better to comprehend this amazing declaration of the Lord. He points to mansions numberless for hearts and minds of infinitely diverse development, wants, and capacities: a dwelling for the pious day-labourer, whose look extends no further than his hut and spade; but a dwelling also for the spirit of a Copernicus, who measures out and traverses the heavens, yet falls asleep in Christ with the prayer of the repentant thief upon the cross: many mansions, and the fairest which is pictured is with Jesus. And in these dwellings a union without end of all good spirits, who here learnt to praise God with each other, and together with Him who, as their friend, has gone before them. Glorious prospect! is not this sufficient where faith must bear and strive; where love must part and mourn; where hope must ask and wait?

Only one question can cause us uneasiness: the way that leads to this home, this Friend, this reunion. But did not the Lord once say to Thomas, 'the way ye know;' and we understand what Luther affirms: Christ is the first, the middle, the highest step of the ladder to heaven. Happy for us, if we truly understand, and it can be testified of us, 'they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country' (Heb. xi. 14).

ASCENSION DAY—FIFTEENTH MAY.

‘Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?’—ACTS i. II.

‘LIFT up your hearts!’ Can there be a day in the year in which we find it less difficult to cause this song to be heard from the depth of our soul? Here we stand again on the eternally memorable spot where it has been so often good for us to be, and we thank God if we yet may stand here as formerly, with an immoveable faith in the heart, and something of that home-sickness within which makes us understand this passage: ‘As sorrowing, yet always rejoicing.’ In spirit we unite with all the Church militant which to-day in quiet pilgrimage ascend the mount of glorification, and kneel on the spot which shows the last trace of the Son of man. Nothing is here unknown to us; but all is lovely and attractive, because all speaks of peace after the struggle, of coronation after the triumph, of a separation, yea, doubtless, but which has paved the way for an eternal and blessed union. ‘He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things:’ so long as, with Paul, we believe this, is it wonder if the ascension is to us at once one of the highest of manifestations and in itself most beautiful, because it permits us a glance, though it were only one, into a higher reality, in comparison with which these earthly things of ours are but as vapour and as fleeting show. When does the earth sink deeper from our view than when our feet stand on Mount Olivet, where the last greeting sounded? and what question can to-day be more easily answered than this, ‘Why stand ye gazing into heaven?’ We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour; and although we never saw anything else than this, even on His account our heart must rejoice if we had really loved Him, because what

struggle was so hard and what crown so well deserved as His? But we see in that one fact, besides, so many others, whether already brought to pass or guaranteed for the future, that the coronation psalm on our lips becomes at the same time a song of triumph. We see humanity glorified when the Son of man thus mounts His Father's throne; and not too high, assuredly, sounded the ancient vaunt of faith, 'that our flesh is in the heaven.' 'To-day,' so spoke the famed *Chrysostom*, in the most ancient Ascension sermon of the Christian Church which has been preserved for us,—'to-day are we, who do not seem worthy of earth, taken up into heaven: we win the royal throne; and the human race, who were driven by cherubim from paradise, take even a place above the cherubim.' Yea, thus may we now vaunt, so far as we are one with Christ; at least through His exaltation, the work of redemption is gloriously completed on high.

Or if there had been ought wanting to the sacrifice of the cross, should then the Father have crowned Him who brought it with a name above all names; and the Son, who so crowned entered the heavenly sanctuary, why was it so, except in order that He might appear before God with His own blood for us as the eternal High Priest? Nay, verily, He went not hence to leave us orphans, but in order to pray for us on high, to reign through grace, to bless us as none other can. His departure is past; the King, as conqueror, enters His capital city the first, but the gate does not close until the last man of the continually-increasing host has crossed the threshold. This is not attained without a struggle, perhaps even to blood, but even the way to the cross is brightened by the light of the ascension morn. What now is life with Christ other than a mountain, where the Gethsemane of pain is only separated by a few steps from the Bethany of rest; and when

do we better than to-day understand this marvellous saying, 'I reckon that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed'? Every soul that believes has gone with Christ on the way to the cross, but, moreover, shall sit with Christ in heaven; and where the light of the ascension sun to-day is mirrored in our tears, a rainbow rises before our sight as emblem of the triumphal arch through which we enter after Him. Thus, to-day, for each of His people the future is determined, and not our personal future alone, but that of the kingdom of God, that of the whole groaning creation, yea, that of the immeasurable universe; because in this glorified One is included all of whom He is the central point, known or unknown, which are glorified together. The open heaven of this day is prophetic, as is also the cloud which falls there, the emblem of many, many painful experiences of life. It is so, the present day is veiled in cloud, and through a sea of mist we journey forward; but this morning belongs to the sun which gleams now in our eyes, but yet shall beam gloriously, as truly as this is called Ascension Day. Oh, our Lord and Saviour, make this true for us and for many; draw us to Thee, as the heavenly magnet of our souls, and, merciful High Priest, show us the sympathy of Thine undying love!

'Saviour, do Thou lead us on
The path of life which Thou hast gone;
Wake us, that we do not waste
Our time, but after Thee make haste;
Take Thou our hand,
And bring us safe to fatherland.

'Keep Thou us from doing wrong,
Saviour, our whole life long!
Guide us on uneven ways;
Trials, too, to blessings raise:
Guide Thou us, e'en through the strife,
Safely to eternal life.'—VON SINGENDORF.

SIXTEENTH MAY.

'This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.'—ACTS I. II.

THE eleven still stand there, as if fettered to the spot, and gaze into heaven as though in hope that the unwelcome cloud a moment parted may afford them one more last glance at their beloved Saviour. But suddenly they hear a voice, which causes them to turn their eyes from heaven to earth; and, lo, two bright forms stand before them as messengers from Him, who on His departure thinks immediately on the necessities and sufferings of His followers. 'Ye men of Galilee,' thus they spake in tones of love and holy earnestness, 'why stand ye gazing up into heaven?' To remain longer here is needless; the Lord has now re-entered His Father's house, and will not again return to the midst of you. But be comforted; He who thus leaves you is not therefore lost to you; the relation between you subsists, and the hour of reunion will come. 'This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come,' as visibly, in a human form, glorified in the sight of all, borne on the clouds, 'as ye have seen Him go into heaven.' And when these words were ended, the gleaming light of heaven disappeared entirely; the earth is once more earth; they stand alone, yet not alone. But who can marvel that now pain changes into joy, uncertainty into hope, and the Mount of Olives is transformed into a mount of adoration, the like of which was never seen before? On bended knees they worship the glorified One, and can now descend—yea, in another sense must needs descend—to return to the city of blood; but they depart not as sheep without a shepherd, but as trusted ambassadors and subjects of the kingdom, who

stand fast as does Mount Olivet on her foundations ; we have a Lord in heaven, a Lord who there knows us, thinks on us, and strengthens us, and who shall one day come in glory to rule as sovereign over all, and to crown the faithfulness of His loyal people !

It is notorious—and it has not seldom given occasion for contradiction and bitter mockery to the foes of the gospel—that the expectation awakened in the hearts of the eleven by the angels' words, in the form in which they undoubtedly received it, has hitherto remained unfulfilled. Probably some of them looked for the resplendent manifestation of the Master's glory as Messiah on the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem ; but after this the world went on again in her old course, and the last cloud has disappeared before the glazing eye of the last apostle, without bringing back to them as on triumphal car their glorified Redeemer in His bodily form. By the light of history we now see more clearly than was then possible to these men of Galilee, that this 'coming' of Jesus, of which the gospel speaks so frequently, is not a momentary manifestation, but continuous and ever increasing in glory, by which means it is constantly more evident that God has made Him to be Christ. May it not also be ascribed to the fact that the expectation of the second coming of the Lord, which in the apostolic age stood so strongly in the foreground, has gradually weakened, and with many has quite disappeared, that the question of the scoffer is continually heard louder: 'Where is the promise of His coming?' Yet this question is just one of the signs and portents of the last day described in 2 Pet. iii. 4 ; and on reflection, we easily see that the continual spiritual coming of the Lord to His kingdom in no wise takes away from the great promise of the day of ascension, but on the contrary, slowly and certainly prepares the way for its complete accomplishment. Thoughtful belief

feels a necessity to form a definite idea regarding the close of the history of the universe and of God's kingdom as well as the beginning ; but vainly does it seek a prospect more satisfying, more worthy of God and Christ, more rich in consolation and in power, than is unlocked to us in the gospel declaration : 'Maranatha—Jesus comes.' Yea, once more shall the earth that bore His cradle and His cross behold Him in His glory, and we too shall see our Saviour as our Judge, nay, as our King in all His beauty. What is here figurative and what literal no human tongue can tell ; just as in every unfulfilled prophecy we view the truth yet faintly as in a mirror. But is it requisite that every question should be fully answered before we come with the eleven to kneel adoringly, and to rejoice in hope ? Does not the Lord come for us in the hour of death ? and do we not comprehend what the saying of the angels constantly repeats to our hearts and consciences ? Assuredly it is now good again to stand and to gaze up into the heavens in blessed contemplation of the Friend of our lost souls ; better certainly than that the reproach should meet us : 'Why stand ye here and gaze continually earthward ?' Nevertheless we too must descend and return ; labour and strive ; watch and wait . . . Happy we when we do this with the ineradicable perception in our hearts : the Lord cometh to reward every one according to his work. May He Himself make us faithful, and give us boldness ever on the nearer approach of the great day with increased joy to exclaim : 'Amen ; so come, Lord Jesus !'

SEVENTEENTH MAY.

‘Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.’—JOHN xiii. 36.

WE can easily understand that Peter could not possibly hear the Lord speak of His approaching departure without the question escaping his lips: ‘Lord, whither goest Thou?’ and immediately afterwards: ‘Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake.’ Such moments as these, especially in Ascension Week, frequently recur to fervent natures like that of Peter, which know something of this longing: ‘When shall I go hence, and appear before God?’ Sometimes it seems much easier, and at the same time far more desirable, to die in peace with Christ, than in this period of strife to live for Christ; the dungeon may be so narrow, and the free air so attractive. In such hours it may be to us as though the silent question of our soul received the same reply as Peter: ‘Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.’ Especially when we consider this saying in a more general sense, as a promise from our absent yet in a certain sense ever present Lord, in regard to the future destiny of His people, there lies therein an evident supposition, a satisfactory explanation, a comforting assurance, but at the same time a powerful incitement, for which we who come after His first followers cannot possibly be sufficiently thankful.

Jesus’ friends must follow Him to heaven; this is rather implied here than plainly expressed. He went thither in order that He might be glorified, not without them, but in and through them. They may accordingly count upon it; there awaits them, moreover, in His immediate neighbourhood an honour which shall make

amends for all the reproach and conflict of earth. They then see themselves called at once to a work of absolute God-glorifying, which never like the earthly task shall weary and exhaust, but which shall infinitely satisfy their highest requirements. For them also is prepared a joy not unlike to His when He is satisfied in beholding God's countenance ; in a word, like to His, so runs their course on high.

But, Lord, why then not at once ? Lord, wherefore for many so long and painful a delay ? *The friends of Jesus cannot follow Him now*, most commonly for the same reason for which Peter's petition was refused. Assuredly much must be unlearnt, which has indeed by grace been pardoned, but nevertheless must be plucked up both root and branch ere we can be in any measure fitted for the honour, the occupation, and the joys of heaven ; so much worldly-mindedness and unbelief, so much pride and want of love often disfigure the best of us, and such dispositions we cannot take with us there. Probably there is still much to be done, if the Lord will employ us in His service here ; the faithful labourer must not long too much after the shadows of evening, since the day's task is still so far from being quite completed. Possibly there may be much to suffer ere this address can gladden us : 'Enter now into the joy of thy Lord.' Peter must still live to die at last upon the cross ; and many a one, like Abraham, does not lie down in the grave until he has passed through in the evening of his days a Moriah of bitterest trial. Only when the fruit is perfectly ripe is it ready for plucking ; only when the gold has passed through the trial of fire is it fit to shine in the crown of the monarch.

Shall we then for one moment complain even in thought ? But if we do, we cannot certainly understand that which the text so emphatically teaches : *The friends of Jesus shall follow Him hereafter*. Yea, this

remains whatever else gives way ; the most positive promises—read merely the farewell of Jesus—affirm it ; His guidance of His people aims at it ; the most glorious facts—the ascension even in the first place—manifest it. Inestimable assurance in all the trials of life, in all the terror of death, in all, further, which eternity may offer of the enigmatical to enlightened faith ! But, at the same time, how powerful the incentive to grateful, glorifying and faithful following of Him, who even by such promises at the most touching moment showed how He understood the deepest wants of His followers, and will only subject them for a short season to disappointment and purification, in order thereafter to gladden them. Yet it must never be forgotten that we have here a promise from the Lord to a disciple, weak indeed, but upright, uttered *after* the traitor had gone forth from the midst of them. It is a promise to Peter, not to Judas ; not even to the Simon of early days, but to the faithful, loving, sanctified Peter, who desires nothing more ardently than to answer to his new name, and who from the bottom of his heart seeks above all to do the Lord's will, more even than to be at once beside Him. Why not now ? he understands it afterwards, and so shall we with him when we have made his later watchword ours : Follow, testify, and wait. We need not sigh whilst thus we wait, but rather have upon our lips the Pilgrim's song :—

‘ Not long shall all this last,
Hold but thy courage fast ;
When a few more hours are done,
See the goal at last is won !

‘ Then we shall taste the rest
Prepared for all the blest ;
To our Father's house repair,
Free for ever from all care.’—TERSTEEGEN.

EIGHTEENTH MAY.

‘These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.’—
ACTS i. 14.

‘*EXAUDI*,’—thus for centuries has this Sunday been designated in the ecclesiastical year, in allusion to the commencement of the Collect borrowed from Ps. xxvii. 7: ‘Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice.’ By some old divines it has been termed ‘the orphan among Sundays,’ because, as it was quaintly observed, ‘the Son had now departed, and the Holy Ghost had not yet come.’ As regards this, however, we feel perfectly certain that the Lord did not leave behind Him His own followers entirely comfortless as orphans; but yet we perceive, at the same time, that as many of us as have in some measure realized these things, find ourselves now in a peculiar transitional period, in which it behoves us equally to look back and also forwards. Where should we like better to find ourselves on such a Sunday, than in the small but select company of the first friends of Jesus? where could our thoughts more acceptably dwell, than in the upper chamber, wherein, in those days at least, more benefit was to be received than in the splendid temple? Among those here assembled are certainly not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but still how desirable a circle, and specially how excellent the spirit that reigns amongst them!

Let us look at the assembly: the names are almost all well known to us, and to each of these is bound a reminiscence, to each reminiscence is attached a fresh incitement to love the Master. There is Peter, once more foremost, and to remain so honourably; along with

him the sons of thunder, who are evidently now apostles of peace. Andrew, here too named fourth in order, as he is also described on the Mount of Olives the last Tuesday before Easter (Mark xiii. 3); Philip and Thomas, the eager questioner next to the reticent thinker; Bartholomew, the same as Nathanael, and Matthew, also called Levi,—the guileless Israelite from Cana next to the prudent publican of Capernaum; James the son of Alpheus, and Simon, once the zealot against earthly tyranny, now the enthusiast for the heavenly King. Finally, Judas, the brother of James, otherwise named Lebbeus or Thaddeus, and—but the twelfth is lost from the circle—the son of perdition has gone to his own place. United in brotherhood with the eleven, we moreover find some other individuals; their speech proclaims them to be Galileans; but look with keen observation,—they are the brothers of the Lord. Yonder, somewhat more in the shade, you may discover a not less interesting group, the women from Galilee, whose love paid homage to the Lord after His death, and now after His glorious ascension has mounted to adoring faith. And who may this more aged than the others be, treated by all present with marked respect, and yet herself the humblest and most unobtrusive there, though in her beaming eye the ecstasy of her youth may yet be read, ‘Henceforth all generations shall call me blessed’? For the last time we here encounter Mary on the scene of history, before she calmly and silently is lost to sight. Yet once again, what a company! Almost each one has left a history here strangely interwoven, a path on which the footsteps of God’s holy child Jesus stand indelibly impressed. Above all, what a temper and disposition reign here, displaying the most beautiful harmony along with the richest diversity! No jar of discord is heard, no spark of unhallowed passion gleams here. From the circle the visible centre is

absent, but it only draws the closer together, and every soul blends with the rest into one prayer and one glorification of God. The prayer always ascends more fervent, louder, higher than the cloud, which hid the Master from their sight; and as on the wings of the morning it penetrates even to the throne of light, it may be in the words of the seer: 'Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens!' Centuries afterwards we repeat the song: Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore!

And we ourselves, who not without deep shame often perceive in and around us dispositions widely different, can we on this Sabbath especially enter the upper chamber without hearing a serious summons? But the week on which we are entering leads us nearer the feast of Pentecost, and the question as to the way to the enjoyment of an abundant Pentecost blessing is here answered for us in the most striking manner. If in our heart, in our household, in our community, there were more of this spirit of living faith in the glorified Redeemer; of this spirit of love, which made all differences forgotten; of this spirit of prayer, above all, which made the disciples persevere in social supplication, might it not be said also of us: 'They were all filled with the Holy Ghost'? Oh that this week might be for multitudes a week of prayer; that the suppliant spirit and something of the temper that reigned in that upper chamber might be found in countless sanctuaries, but above all in many an inner chamber of the heart!

NINETEENTH MAY.

‘The number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty.’—
ACTS i. 15.

AROUND the eleven disciples, and the nearest relations of the Lord, were now and then assembled, once at least within these ten days, a wider but not less interesting circle. They are those who have received benefits to soul and body from Jesus, and now are associated by their belief in His Messiahship; in number about a hundred and twenty, who cannot declare His name although their hearts begin to glow with eager aspiration, and their lips overflow with praises. Assuredly an hour in the spirit spent in this quiet upper chamber is better to us than a thousand anywhere else.

The *ornaments of Jerusalem*, thus in the fullest sense of the words this assembly might well be termed. Doubtless Caiaphas offers to them no brother's hand; Annas will not invite them to his table, and the greater portion of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who at any time may meet them in the bustling streets, vouchsafe them not one glance. And yet there shines here a nobleness of soul found nowhere else; here shows itself a wisdom which the princes of this world know not; here is knit a bond of perfectness of heart and spirit which exists in no other spot of earth.

Such a circle is the *glory of Christ*, already in its very existence, and still more in the preservation which through His guidance has been maintained. It is indeed the Lord who has brought this circle together; who through the mighty influence of His personality binds it so closely into one; who through His word and Spirit have so influenced its members, that they thus remain

together as one man during these ten days. This spirit of fellowship is as it were the visible inheritance from the ascended Saviour, as His peace was the invisible; and it testifies to His honour, before a single witness of the resurrection opens his lips to preach. The apostles have been alternately called deceivers and fanatics; strange fanatics, in truth, who could wait so long and calmly till the promise of the Father was fulfilled; strange deceivers, who tarry the ten days in Jerusalem, whilst not one of them seems to be afraid of the question, whether he has stolen the body of his Master! Nay, this period of expectation is moreover absolutely inexplicable, if the spirit of the gospel is ought else than the spirit of the highest truth, purity, and moderation; and if it is so, then with our eye upon this upper chamber we may write above the entrance of this sanctuary: 'Whose builder and maker is God.'

It is the *commencement of God's kingdom* on which we gaze with quiet admiration, and it may be to us as though we stood beside the hidden source of a stream which thence speeds along to water regions vast beyond belief. These hundred and twenty persons, what are they but the first sprouting of the seed once sown, which as yet scarcely shows itself above the ground, yet soon shall spread its shady boughs over a wide extent, and the fowls of the air shall come and lodge in its branches? What a small beginning, compared with the vigorous progress and the fair destiny; but, moreover, what encouraging presage that the gates of hell should not prevail against the Church! Still the spiritual kingdom of God stands towards the unbelieving world as for ten days the humble upper chamber stood towards the powerful and magnificent Jerusalem; yet it appears here, too, that the great question is not on what side is the majority to be found, but on what side is the truth. Would that the Spirit which reigned here should become

more dominant among us, even the hundred and twenty shall at last become hundreds of thousands, for that which cometh forth from God cannot possibly die.

But who does not feel that on this spirit of faith and love and prayer everything rests, and the *Christian calling* is here for us simply but plainly indicative of life? This call is specially to personal, living faith. Here we may positively assert there were no others present than genuine believers; alas! where is now the house of prayer so small as to contain no mixed multitude? and what would it profit us to be outwardly numbered amongst the friends of Jesus, if the heart remained far from Him? But, moreover, this call is one to living fellowship between all who press around one centre, albeit they have not all the same views, experiences, or expectations. This last was undoubtedly the case in this first circle, and yet what abundant cause to cast down our eyes abashed before these names, for the greater part unknown! What is there among us of united building on the ground of God's word; what of devout co-operation for the cause of God's kingdom; what of mutual invocation of the Lord, the Searcher of hearts? Ah, that it were otherwise, that it were better than at present!

But, God be praised, it shall yet be better, and this same upper chamber may be to us, on a small scale, the type of heaven. May we not believe that there, too, among the redeemed, a like diversity will subsist as amongst these friends? But assuredly this will not injure their unity, and our hope looks forth towards the hour when in far higher sense it shall be said of the whole circle of the saved, 'They were continually in the temple, praising and thanking God.' Who can tell their numbers? May all of us meet there!

TWENTIETH MAY.

'The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.'—JOHN vii. 39.

THIS is one of the short but expressive observations on a remarkable utterance of the Lord, in which without difficulty we recognise the mind and spirit of the beloved disciple. It took place at the close of the last feast of tabernacles which Jesus celebrated on earth, and has reference to the declaration of the Saviour probably on the occasion of the usual libation of water, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.' What He further adds in regard to the streams of living water, John explains to us as belonging to the promise of the Holy Ghost, which on the day of Pentecost and thereafter was abundantly poured forth. 'For,' he continues significantly, 'the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.' He does not of course mean, that the Holy Ghost did not at that time absolutely exist, but only that He had not yet descended as a new principle of life in the hearts of believers. He was undoubtedly in the divine essence; He worked unmistakably under the old dispensation in its chosen followers and interpreters; He was by the Lord Himself, even during His life of humiliation, promised to all who should pray to the Father; but in all His fulness He only first appeared after Christ had been glorified at God's right hand.

The descent of the Holy Ghost was the result of the Redeemer's glorious ascension. With this remark John as it were binds firmly together with his own hand the festivals of the Ascension and of Pentecost, perhaps not without a quiet memory and sidelong reference to the saying of the Master, 'It is expedient for you that I go

away ; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.' The truth of the text becomes more apparent to us on every fresh comparison of the times of the Old Testament dispensation with those of the New. Assuredly, even under that of law and prophecy, the Holy Ghost had not left Himself without a witness. Do we not hear how, even before the flood, He had striven with the old world, until it sunk wholly under the power of the flesh? (Gen. vi. 3.) But still, what are these niggard rain-drops of the first dispensation, compared with the copious spiritual streams of the second? and how far did even the highly gifted prophet stand, in knowledge and comprehension of the truth, beneath the apostle anointed with the Holy Ghost? Nay, it was not otherwise than as John maintains, and if we well consider it, could not be otherwise. So long as the disciples and friends of the Lord, filled with worldly expectations, depended on His visible presence, they were but partially capable of a purely spiritual communion with Him ; but, moreover, He Himself, so long as He yet was enclosed within the narrow bounds of time and space, although He had absolute power, had not the same unlimited opportunity to send down the Spirit upon all flesh. This was from the nature of the matter, not the work of the humiliated, but of the glorified Redeemer ; He must first have overcome death, and be raised above all contact with the sinful world, before He can send forth the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of life, wherever His name is called upon in faith. But that which is now only possible, He does abundantly ; He goes forth unweariedly to work, and, where we see Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, crowned with glory and honour, there it may always be as though we saw Him stand as at the feast of tabernacles at Jerusalem, crying to every soul that thirsts after the living God, with all the urgency of love unbounded, 'If

any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.' Although that which you thirst for pains you, the thirst after infallible truth, after life that passeth not away, thirst after true holiness here, or endless blessing there, through Jesus shall be quenched abundantly. He is Himself the source of life, who through His word and Spirit pours forth continually of His own life into the souls of all who are His. Nay, what is more, that which they first receive in His fellowship becomes immediately in their inmost souls a special principle of life. 'Whoso believeth in me,' thus Christ declared, 'out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters.' The soul, formerly resembling a thirsty field, becomes, according to the language of prophecy, 'like a well-watered garden' (Isa. lviii. 11); and they who first of all must receive, are able afterwards to bestow abundantly on others, and in this manner become not poorer, but intrinsically richer. Glorious promise, which on the last page of the Bible sounds to us as out of the open heavens, 'And let him that is athirst come: and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely' (Rev. xxii. 17). What is wanting to us, and what is claimed of us, in order that we may enjoy its fulfilment immediately and personally? Our Lord speaks of three things: of thirsting, of coming, of drinking. The one cannot be separated from the other; the two first even could not profit without the third; the threefold cord shall then be broken by none of us! Where this threefold claim is understood and complied with, there is also secured the enjoyment of a promise: 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it' (Ps. lxxxix. 11).

TWENTY-FIRST MAY.

'Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!'—NUM. xi. 29.

A PENTECOST prayer of Moses, ages before the day of Pentecost, but never till on that occasion gloriously fulfilled by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost; might we not thus designate this supplication of the mediator of the Old Covenant, sent forth from the depth of his soul, and on a remarkable occasion? A single glance at the context (vers. 16–28) is sufficient to enable us in this passage to read into the heart of a truly great man; but the passage itself, how does it at the same time recall to mind the image of the entire ancient dispensation? Assuredly to individuals even in the olden times the gift of the Holy Spirit was lent, like Eldad and Medad, to prophesy even here outside the tabernacle of the congregation. But still, as here, and as was usual among the Israelites, the Spirit is absent in far the greater portion of the people, and even when He comes and works, His presence is but momentary. The seventy elders, of whom the context speaks, when the Spirit rests on them, prophesy only for a time (ver. 25). Joshua, himself the chosen attendant on the great leader, would rather desire to damp the ecstasy kindled than excite it (ver. 28); and Moses himself—vainly was the ample pouring forth of the Spirit upon all Israel supplicated. Noble man of God! to his idea not merely two more prophets are required; rather there still lack hundreds of thousands. He thinks of Israel's great destiny, but at the same time measures with sadness the distance which they stand from it; and, as it were with eyes raised to heaven, he bides the hour when it shall be otherwise and better. In vain, Moses,

venerable servant of the Most High, thou makest this petition; none can give what thou desirest save God, and His time is not yet come. This 'would God' remains the pious desire expressed by one ambassador from heaven after another, but yet none of them before his death beholds his nation prophets.

But now the page is turned, and by way of contrast we see the rich blessing of the new dispensation as the presage of life. Assuredly the saying is faithful and true: *Every redeemed soul is anointed with the Holy Ghost.* If we truly believe in Christ, we are through Him redeemed from a worse than Egyptian bondage, and have also in our degree experienced the fulfilment of the promise uttered before His departure from the world: 'Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.' This is just the special peculiarity of the days of the new dispensation, that they are days of ample and unlimited pouring forth of the Spirit; no rank, no season of life, no nation is excluded; the Spirit does not merely come occasionally, but remains permanently in those that believe, as their hidden principle of life: 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One,' declares an apostle of the Lord, 'and ye know all things.'

But that which truly lives within cannot but powerfully come forth to view. *Every one that is anointed with the Holy Ghost is exalted to be a Christian prophet.* Nay, not only to be kings and priests, but also to be prophets, does Christ exalt His followers, that is to say, to be living and life-awakening witnesses of His truth and grace, in word, but especially in deed. Or what else is the meaning of the apostle when he writes: 'Ye are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light!' (1 Pet. ii. 9.) This declaration of Paul: 'Desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy' (1 Cor. xiv. 1), was not

intended only for the first community. Every believer can be a witness for Christ ; and if he truly believes, he will be so ; and not merely in the tabernacle of congregation, but, like Eldad and Medad, without in the camp, he feels compelled to glorify the Father, who has brought him out of darkness into His marvellous light. Must he not ever do this more and more loudly, and in it seek companionship with others ?

But just this is the most glorious feature of the perfected ideal : *every Christian prophet is a member of a people belonging to the Lord.* 'All the people of the Lord ;' never has the seed of Abraham but in an extremely defective manner answered to this title of honour ; but the Church of Christ, in so far as it really understands its calling, becomes slowly and gradually more that which Israel could only temporarily and partially be. The Spirit which fills all, unites them also into one living body, of which Christ is the head ; to a holy legion, which may behold the Egyptians behind, and Amalek opposed, and a wilderness in many respects round about, but—a Canaan in front; whither they press forward with unwearied feet, and where the petition of Moses is no longer heard, because the hymn of thankful praise of those blessed ones filled with the Holy Ghost ascends on high : 'Lo, we draw water with joy from the wells of salvation !'

Oh, ye who hear or read this, maintain your privilege, fulfil your calling, make haste to verify the promise, that all the Lord's people shall be prophets ! A day in which in regard to such questions the hand is seriously thrust into the bosom, and the eye prayerfully directed above, shall not be lost to any one of us.

TWENTY-SECOND MAY.

'And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications.'—ZECH. xii. 10.

NOT fruitlessly had, along with Moses, so many other human hearts sought for a copious outpouring of the Holy Ghost. God had answered the appeals of their soul earnestness by promises of blessing, which could issue from His heart and lips alone. One of these promises lies before us, addressed towards the close of the Babylonish captivity, through Zechariah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the house of David; not that the fulfilment should be limited to these alone, but because that here for the time being was exclusively the seat of the kingdom of God, which at a later period should from thence be spread over the whole world. In contrast to the fearful judgment of God, which should come on the enemies of the Lord, they were promised rich gifts of the Spirit 'of grace and of prayer,' that is, according to the most probable interpretation, the influence of the spirit that imparts grace through which He teaches to pray in truth; and in consequence of this benefit, says the Lord, 'they shall look on me whom they have pierced.'

Since no doubt can be entertained that the complete fulfilment of this divine declaration is to be looked for in a yet hidden future, nothing hinders us from profiting even at the present time by the promise given us; and, by the light of the gospel and of experience, considering for a moment the Holy Ghost in the special character in which He is here represented, as the best instructor of the prayer which is well-pleasing to God. Indeed, on more than one account He may be thus regarded; in the first place, because it is through Him that a sense of

the *necessity* of prayer is awakened. Who must not mourn that the necessity which without a doubt exists for all, nevertheless is experienced by comparatively few? and who must not often offer the humble confession: 'We can scarcely urge sluggish flesh and blood to pray'? Who is it, then, who teaches men to inquire and seek after God with an earnestness never felt before? who permits the sinner no rest before his crushed and bruised heart is fashioned to one prayer? Who but the Holy Ghost, who teaches man to cry after God more than the hart panteth after the water brooks; who convinces the sinner of sin, and thus casts him down into the dust of penitence; who constantly fans the flickering flame, and, lo, it blazes bright and high!

Do we often lack courage, poor and miserable as we are, to approach the throne of grace? it is He through whom *boldness* in supplication is heightened. He banishes the spirit of slavish fear, and awakens and strengthens that filial confidence which enables us to go joyfully to the Father in the Son's name; and places Hallelujahs on the lips, which but recently asked with trembling, 'If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?'

Still further, it is the Holy Ghost through whom the *tendency* of prayer is so directed that it becomes in truth glorifying to God and abundantly blessed to ourselves. Are we more disposed to desire what is pleasant than what is actually necessary, and allow ourselves to be blinded through deceptive appearances? He shows us our folly, and induces us to ask of God the best gifts with the most pressing urgency. Do there come moments—what Christian knows them not in his own experience—in which we scarce can tell what we ought to pray for? According to the consoling word of the apostle, it is now the Spirit which helpeth our infirmities, and even prays for us with groanings which

cannot be uttered (Rom. viii. 26): so that all the varying, often conflicting, desires of this restless heart are made subservient to this one object, that God's name shall be glorified, and His will in and through us be perfectly accomplished.

And even as regards those wishes which are frustrated, the desires at least cannot and shall not be in vain; indeed, 'He that searcheth the heart, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit,' and through this same Spirit again is the hearing of prayer assured to us. The Amen of faith, so frequently taken heedlessly upon the lips, He places in the supplicating heart, and instructs God's children to trust with perfect certainty that the answer of prayer, whatever its form, cannot possibly fail to be sent. The infallible promise associated with prayer in the name of Jesus He teaches us to comprehend in all its depth, and to adapt to our own wants; but preserves us at the same time from the folly of unreasonably prescribing to God a course of action, as if we might extort from Him that which had not before been determined in His counsel for our happiness.

Thus it is He through whom, finally, the *fellowship* of prayer is perfected; because where He lives, there have all whom He guides to the throne of grace an actual fellowship with one another,—with the Son, with the Father. Thus He forms and trains a constantly increasing number of worshippers in spirit and in truth; and those whom He here thus teaches to pray, He teaches on high to praise for grace eternally. Oh, ye who have felt something of all this! should ye not then pray for the Holy Ghost? Ye who know Him! should ye not pray more fervently *in* the Holy Ghost, without whom our defective speaking to God shall never be true prayer?

TWENTY-THIRD MAY.

'The same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.'—JOHN i. 33.

NUMBERS of prophetic voices had at different times manifested the glory of Christ; but had He ever received a testimony more honourable, more real, more pleasing, and more impressive, than that which John renders in the words of the text? It is nothing less than the re-echo of an infallible utterance of God's voice, heard by him before in an hour never to be forgotten on the banks of the Jordan. He who had sent him to baptize, had said to him in secret: 'Upon whom thou shalt see the Holy Ghost descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.' As such John reveals Him then to his disciples, persuaded that he could not possibly say anything more to His honour. To baptize with the Holy Ghost had never been accomplished in the days of the Old Dispensation; it surpassed the power of the greatest of the prophets. Moses and Elias were those who felt most deeply that they had not the ability to dispense the gifts of the Holy Ghost; only when the time of the Messiah arrived was a universal and copious outpouring of the Spirit to be looked for, according to the word of Joel and his fellow-witnesses. Centuries elapsed, in which Israel is like a barren and desert field; one generation passing away after another inquires: How long? There appears at last in quiet lowliness on the banks of the Jordan, among so many others, an inhabitant of Nazareth to ask baptism from John: without any preliminary confession of sin, He goes down into the water in adoration: the Baptist in ecstasy beholds the promised sign, and now he knows with perfect certainty, that which he at first had dimly surmised, that here

stood before him the Being predicted who was greater than he. Well might he proceed: 'I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.' He who can freely impart the Holy Spirit in all fulness, must be more than all men and angels together. The most copious eulogy could not more highly manifest His dignity than this one sentence of him who went before to prepare the way of the Messiah! Is it Jesus, and Jesus alone, who baptizes with the Holy Ghost? He must be in possession of a power which can subdue all opposition; of a wisdom which regulates the measure of the gift according to the nature of the requirement; of a glory, in a word, which permits Him to say to the Father regarding the Spirit: 'All Thine is mine.' It does not surprise us that the herald, who knows this, stoops so reverentially before the King. His disciples must soon perceive that here nothing too great is testified.

'The same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.' What an infallible seal has the history of Jesus' own life, and the experience of later ages, impressed upon this declaration of the Baptist! Scarcely do we regard Him attentively, till we receive the impression that here the Spirit has been given without measure (John iii. 34); so that, opposed to the wants and necessities of others, the greatest fulness of spiritual life is really revealed and manifested. The words which He speaks, His spirit and life, nay, the whole of His intercourse with His people, deserves to be termed a daily continued communication of both. Has He before His departure repeated to them the promise of the Spirit?—after His glorious resurrection He breathes on them the sovereign and prophetic breath of His new life, and does not ascend from earth to heaven without even in the hour of separation speaking of the power from on high. And what would the Baptist then have said had he experienced the miracles of the day of Pentecost, and

beheld something of all the spiritual glories which the apostolic age and the whole history of the kingdom of God in later times displayed in such abundant measure? Wherever Christ appears, God's river of living waters straight springs forth ; the stream of grace continues to flow, though millions have already descended into it ; nay, this heavenly Baptist stands ready in all places, where those who desire salvation come to Him ; and His baptism is no mere sprinkling with niggard drops, but, indeed, an immersion in the full stream of the Spirit, which by Him is dispensed to the whole multitude. Well is it for us that this saying never ceases to pass into fulfilment, although the days of the extraordinary imparting of the Holy Ghost have long since ceased ! All that we know and expect from the Lord, what should it specially profit us, did we not also know that the same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost,—the Spirit of truth which enlightens us, the Spirit of purity which renews us, the Spirit of power which sanctifies us ? Just because in this sense He is the great Baptist, He is also the perfect Redeemer, the eternal King, the vaunt and hope of faith. Let no one give a mere assent to this, without earnestly seeking for himself, whether for the first time or not, these blessings as the best and highest he can ask ! With respect to baptism with the Holy Ghost, men may without heresy consider it as desirable and possible, and the place where it can be received is not far to seek. It is no further off than the inner chamber of your heart.

TWENTY-FOURTH MAY.

'I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground.'—ISA. xlv. 3.

THIS is one of the most glorious utterances of the Scriptures of the Old Testament; one of those by which Isaiah has deserved the title of the fifth evangelist. But may it not be termed the summary of all God's promises regarding spiritual blessings to be expected in the fulness of the times; and although the impressive introduction had not been present, 'Thus saith the Lord that made thee,' who does not feel at once that it is the voice of God and not of man we hear? and who does not grasp with both hands the staff of this divine prophecy of salvation?

Nay, there is no necessity too deep for what this promise shows. What availed to Israel an outward redemption? what was to them even the external appearance of Cyrus, if God had not Himself caused a day of higher spiritual life to dawn? And again, what avails to us the appearance, nay, even the whole gospel of Christ, if the quickening power of the Holy Ghost is not personally known and experienced by us? The barren soil is not perhaps at the same time the thirsty. Oh, striking emblem of so many hearts and households, years after the Sun of the spiritual world has outwardly illuminated them, but which have never yet been refreshed by the rain of the Holy Spirit! Who is not affrighted, at least at times, at the dryness, the unfruitfulness, the deadness in the little world within, in which, perhaps, all may be blameless before men; but before the eye of God there is but one thing lacking, yet with it all? Frail mortals that we are, that which we most require we are least able to procure for ourselves and for one another; happy

are we to whom a promise belongs so rich and copious as that here described !

Nay, there are no *promises* so ample as those which indeed are not directed solely to Israel, but to all whose souls have learnt to thirst after the living God. 'Streams of water'—in order to feel all the beauty of the emblem, one must be a native of the East, inhabiting for instance Arabia Deserta, when he will consider this as a fabulous good fortune of other lands, and with eyes raised towards heaven exclaim, 'They have as much water as they can desire !' or rather, one needs only to be a man and a sinner in order immediately to know and perceive that anything higher than this the Almighty Himself cannot bestow. What water is for the dry and thirsty land, the Holy Ghost is for the sinful heart ; it is thereby nourished and refreshed ; traces of a new life, of an inward transformation, begin to appear, and they who behold it only a few weeks after the descent of the long-desired rain will scarcely recognise it.

Indeed, there is no *fulfilment* of promises so faithful as God's. Not merely God's truth and honour stand pledged, but Jesus Christ Himself, in whom also these promises are yea and amen, is exalted at God's right hand to pour out the Spirit upon all flesh ; and eighteen centuries attest that the Almighty never abandons the work of His own hands. Times of barrenness and darkness have undoubtedly occurred earlier or later for the husbandry of the Spirit ; but in the Lord's good time they are quickened by fresh streams of life, and not one single soul that really believes but shall find the fulfilment of this word so as to call forth eternal gratitude.

There is no *transformation* so beautiful as that which is seen ceaselessly going forward in the heart, the community, the world, where this great promise of God is at least realized. Simply but strikingly it is set forth in the emblem, 'They shall spring up as among the grass,

as willows by the water-courses.' In the eyes of the world, the children of the Holy Spirit are small and insignificant—willows, not oaks or cedars; in the neighbourhood of the living waters they open and develop themselves. From spiritual fellowship with Christ, the soul that is refreshed through Him imbibes hidden power of life; and although, like the weeping willow, their boughs hang down disconsolately, yet they are ever growing inwardly, as in the face of the stream, till at last they can brave even the heaviest storms.

But thus they can rejoice in an *expectation* not less glorious than that which opened before Israel. The promises of God are received in Babylon, and even partially accomplished there; but they point towards Jerusalem: the first-fruits of the Holy Spirit are promised and received here upon earth; but they not only presage, they *guarantee* an eternal harvest, when the pouring forth of the Spirit is completed above. Only when this declaration is realized, 'They shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more,' is the last seal of this prophecy broken.

Blessed, thrice blessed are we who hear it; when shall it be for us in truth the word of life? Then, and only then, when we can say with the psalmist (cxliii. 6), 'I stretch forth my hands unto Thee; my soul thirsteth after Thee, as a thirsty land.' Ah, that the voice may cause itself to be heard, and that we may suffer it so to penetrate the inmost chamber of our hearts, that we may pray as we have never done before! If we are in earnest, we shall not ask in vain, 'Let my voice also be heard in the morning,' for the feast of Pentecost approaches, and God's good Spirit shall lead us in the smooth path.

PENTECOST.—TWENTY-FIFTH MAY.

‘And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.’—ACTS ii. 4.

‘Come, Holy Ghost, Creator, come,
And visit all the souls of Thine :
Thou hast inspired our hearts with life ;
Inspire them now with life divine.

Thou art the Comforter, the gift
Of God most high ; the fire of love,
The everlasting spring of joy,
And holy unction from above.’

THUS sounded forth already a thousand years ago the hymn of the Christian Church ; and when can it more seasonably be repeated, when should more loudly echo the ancient ‘Veni, Creator Spiritus,’ than to-day, on the feast of Pentecost? Thus has again dawned the third, the last, but by no means the least of our Christian festivals, the feast of the first manifestation of Jesus’ glory after His departure from the earth ; the feast of the institution and birth of the Church which is founded in His blood ; the feast of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the first witnesses and friends of the Lord, but which in its results may at the same time be termed the great feast of the transformation of the face of the moral world. Can it surprise us that the world, which has no eyes and no heart for spiritual things, usually appreciates this feast least of all, and rather seeks its satisfaction in the enjoyment of nature than in gratitude for the copious outpouring of the Spirit! Men must in some degree be filled with the Holy Ghost in order to value aright the blessing of this day ; they must with the eye of the Spirit have seen something of the glory of the New Dispensation, in order to know fully the value of the declaration : ‘The promise is to you and

to your children, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call.' Just this is the glory of the feast of Pentecost, that it not merely renews the remembrance of a most interesting event in the past, but, moreover, points us to the source of richest blessing for the present, and opens to us the brightest prospect for the so frequently beclouded future. In the narrative of the descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, an expression is twice employed, which most happily sets forth the peculiar character of the fact which we to-day commemorate in conjunction with the whole Church, militant and triumphant. 'When the day of Pentecost was fully come (*vervuld*), they were all filled (*vervuld*) with the Holy Ghost.' Thus it is: Pentecost is the feast of *fulfilment* in the highest and best sense of the word. On this day was fulfilled the most beautiful anticipation of *antiquity*. However deep humanity may sink, the idea always remains in their life, that they were intended for something higher and better; and especially the wise and devout among the Israelites awaited with painful desire the time, when not only atonement should be made to Jehovah for the sins of the people, but also a new heart and a new spirit should be given to them; yea, He Himself should dwell in the midst of them, so that He should be their God, and they should be to Him a peculiar people. Do you know anything more beautiful than the prophetic ideal of the day of the New Covenant (Jer. xxxi. 31-34), in which men shall no more say to their neighbour and their brother, 'Know the Lord;' for all shall know Him, and He Himself shall engrave His laws on the tables of their hearts! Well, this glorious prospect began to pass into fulfilment when on the birthday of the Old Dispensation the New was introduced and consecrated; and this shows, that of all God's promises of salvation, no jot or tittle shall fall to the ground.

At the same time is fulfilled in this region of marvel

the deepest want of *humanity*. The really human cannot subsist in man without personal fellowship with God ; but this fellowship is impossible for the sinner, unless God Himself prepare a way of salvation in the highest sense of the word—that is, not only giving reconciliation, but, moreover, sanctification. Reconciliation is effected through the sacrifice of Christ ; but what avails even this surpassing benefit, so long as the pardoned sinner is not really renewed after the inner man ; and how should there be speech for a moment of this sanctification without the promise and gift of the Holy Ghost ? He alone gives us eyes to see the truth, hearts to feel it, tongues to confess Jesus as our Lord, that He may really be praised and magnified through us. From the ruin within, He forms a dwelling of God ; of the slave of sin, He makes the Lord's free man.

But thus we behold the accomplishment of nothing less than the highest manifestation of *Divinity*. The manifestation of redemption was completed in principle on the day of Pentecost. All that went before, even the gift of the Son, only prepared the way for the sending down of the Spirit, which enables us fully to comprehend the truth, and brings those who believe along this path to life and light. Just on this account Pentecost is also a festival of perpetual observance for the congregation of the Lord. It never ends, not even in the heavenly temple ; but it first begins in reality for you and for me whenever it can be said, too, of us : ' Filled with the Holy Ghost.' Ah, if for us in this sense this festival might be the feast of fulfilment, how much louder should the sound of thankfulness ascend : ' This is the day which the Lord hath made, let us be glad and rejoice in it. O Lord, give now salvation ; Lord, give now prosperity !'

SECOND DAY OF PENTECOST.—TWENTY-SIXTH MAY.

‘What meaneth this?’—ACTS ii. 12.

AGAIN we place ourselves in company with all Christendom in the simple upper chamber, where the Spirit of life is poured forth in signs, both visible and audible. A great multitude, gathered together at the hour of the morning sacrifice in the temple, press before our eyes to the entrance, and listen in silent amazement to that which is declared by Galilean tongues concerning the great works of God. Is it marvel that the most opposite impressions are awakened by this scene, and that the question, ‘What meaneth this?’ is uttered by unnumbered mouths, and often in tones of doubt? For us, thank God, the question has received an answer in the result: an answer through which the simple spot has become to us a Bethel, a dwelling-place, and a workshop of God.

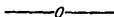
What meaneth this, ye doubtful questioners, which ye now see and hear? In the first place, ye now behold the majesty of the *Father*, from whom the whole race in heaven and on earth are named. Here is manifested His power, which through signs and wonders bears testimony to the word of grace; and, like the Old Dispensation, so also the New establishes and makes it firm, in a manner which takes away from us all doubt regarding its divine origin. Here manifests itself His deep wisdom, which personally introduces Christianity just in the same place, and, in part, in presence of the same witnesses that had beheld the humiliation of the Saviour on the preceding feast of the Passover. No inhabitant of Crete shall return to the distant isle of his birth, no Libyan to his glowing home, without being able to bear with him the tidings: ‘This Jesus has God made to be Lord and Christ.’ But thus, at the same time, His preparing grace manifests itself in

a surprising way, because all these witnesses of the miracle of Pentecost, in so far as they belong to those that 'fear God,' receive by it an impression which, in the first place, for themselves, and immediately after for those around them, shall produce incalculable results. That which occurs here shall within a few weeks be spoken of in those different parts of the world ; it draws forth the question : What do these things mean ? It thus becomes, although not at that time perceived, the preparing of the way for the gospel in different lands and nations. . . . Truly our God is great in counsel, but at the same time mighty in deed !

Once more, what meaneth this ? The glory of the Son appears here before us in heightened splendour. Come and see ; thus should we desire to cry to every one, Come and see the glory of the exalted Sovereign of God's kingdom : now, at last, it appears before the eyes of both friends and foes, that God has raised Him from the dead, and has given Him a name above all names. Come and see the glory of the faithful witness ; in this upper chamber is literally fulfilled that which He seven weeks before, in another upper chamber, spake concerning the Comforter, who should take His place. Come and see here, finally, the glory of the perfect Conqueror, who penetrates and fills the hearts and souls of His people ; who here in the Spirit makes a second entry into Jerusalem ; nay, at this eternally memorable moment, manifestly begins the conquest of the whole Gentile world. In truth, already on the day of Pentecost He had manifested in a glorious manner His right to the title of King of kings, and Lord of lords.

What meaneth this, for the last time, oh ye doubting hearts, who are yet favourably disposed to the gospel ? The power of the Holy Ghost is here seen in signs and tokens, which at the same time presage a higher, a more glorious future. Thus, as ye see in these Galileans, He

so transforms the heart, that ye can scarcely recognise the old man any longer in the new, and He teaches to speak of the great works of God with other tongues. Thus He founds the Church ; the Church which is to be His temple, and the herald of salvation to the world ; the Church which is the seminary of the community passing across the stage of existence, the spiritual body of Christ, the glorified head. Thus He subdues to Himself, and blesses the world, and establishes in it a spiritual and imperishable kingdom of God ; the final aim of all the works of creation, providence, and redemption, in which at last all hostile powers shall yield before the supremacy of the Spirit. The miracle of tongues, what is it but a significant intimation of the appointment of Christianity to be the religion of the world ? Yea, verily, the gospel must speak all languages, and can and shall do so one day, because its deepest marrow and essence, really divine, is also human ; not from man, nor according to man, but still for man, for all men without exception, adapted to the deepest, the unvarying cravings of humanity, and alone fitted fully to satisfy them. Yea, verily, the foundation of God standeth sure, even on the dust of many a dead mockery ; and at every token of the times, which draws forth from us this question : ‘What meaneth this ?’ faith constantly receives a louder answer from the Lord of the community : ‘Lo, I come quickly, and my Spirit shall transform the world !’



TWENTY-SEVENTH MAY.

‘But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words.’—ACTS ii. 14.

IN earlier times, as at the Passover, so too at Pentecost, the whole week was more or less considered and celebrated as a festival ; later, the Church observance

was limited to three days ; at the present time, the second feast-day would seem, according to the theory and practice of many, to be too much, and at any rate on the third day all return to the ordinary occupations of life. Yet we cannot and we will not do so, without once more placing ourselves in thought on the remarkable spot where it has already been good for us to be. Peter stands before us *symbol* and *example* at once of the powerful working of the Holy Ghost in the upright disciples of the Lord. The occasion of His appearance we know ; but the appearance itself, how does it make evident that he is really endowed with light and power from on high ? And how deserving is the whole of his Pentecost discourse of being attentively considered from this point of view ! In self-defence, not a word more than is necessary appears ; as always, it is here evident that a good conscience is the mother of true confidence. It is as though he makes haste to come from the consideration of persons to that of things ; and not less than the distinction between a stormy evening sky and the bright starry heavens, is the difference between the Simon of former times and the immoveable Cephas of to-day. Then, Satan stood in the way of the Lord ; now, the hand of protection is stretched out over the friends of Jesus : then, he was the great denier ; now, the great confessor : then, blind to the truth in view of the clearest declarations of Scripture ; now, the judicious interpreter of the Bible, who expounds the oracle of Joel : then, the mean-spirited coward, who gave way before the question of a maid-servant ; now, the hero who looks a whole hostile legion undismayed in the face, and no longer rashly, as in Gethsemane, asks : ' Lord, shall we smite with the sword ? ' but with powerful grasp handles the sword of the Spirit, and gives wounds to the healing of souls. Explain to us the contradiction, ye who deny that on the day of Pentecost an extraordinary and

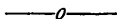
direct influence from above had place on the apostles ! It is here evident how the Holy Spirit in no respect annihilates personality, but rather unfetters, develops, transforms it. The apostle who was the first at the call of Jesus to cast himself into the deep, is also the first who for His cause ventures into the surf of this troubled human sea. But although it is thus the same Peter, still it is quite a different being from the original ; he has become a new creature in Christ Jesus, and in this respect is for all ages an encouraging presage even for the vilest sinner of what the power of grace may accomplish to the enlightenment of a darkened understanding, and to the elevation of a spiritual life above its sullied past. Oh, ye who ask in anxiety : How is it possible that all old things have indeed passed away, and that from the chaos a new world has been created ? —the Spirit which wrought powerfully in Peter is already promised to you also in baptism.

But if the good work is once begun in our hearts, and we are able through the grace of God to speak of a day of Pentecost within our own inner life, how may this same Peter furnish us with an awakening *example* of the life and the reality of the Holy Ghost ! Where the Spirit really fills the heart, it shows itself by kindling in the soul also a Pentecost fire of holy zeal for the honour of the Lord, and for the salvation of those souls which yet know not Him and the gospel ; we then seek no honour to ourselves, but the honour of Him who holds the first place in our hearts ; then, no fear of man fetters our lips, but we fear much more to displease Him who wills that we should let our light appear ; then, we shall not be embittered, but permit ourselves to be directed by the spirit of gentle wisdom : we love peace, but above all we value the truth ; and when this last is opposed, we feel something of Peter's zeal kindle within us, and take as our own the watchword of the great Calvin, who on

this same day (27th May 1564) passed from the Church militant to the Church triumphant: 'A dog will bark if his master be assailed; how then should I be silent when men resist God's truth?'

Ah, how far is it from being the case, that the fruit of the spirit of Pentecost is seen of many in our days, and that the blessing of the feast of Pentecost is truly desired by multitudes! Mockers, gainsayers of all that is sacred, abound everywhere, and the sweet wine of the festival is in less request than ever; but where are the really faithful and true witnesses? Thank God, they are not entirely absent; but yet, Church of the present day, thy name is Laodicea! How shall this be remedied? Only when in truth we can declare, with Calvin, 'I bring my bleeding heart a sacrifice to the Lord,' and when the prayer of the devout poet to the Holy Spirit is constantly heard in louder accents—

'Crucify my former lust!
Lay my soul low in the dust!
And renew me in God's fear
Till I Jesus' image bear.'—P. GERHARDT.



TWENTY-EIGHTH MAY.

'Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?'—ACTS xix. 2.

INDISCREET questions are found in abundance, and unnecessary ones are equally common; but certainly no one will consider as coming under either of these categories, that which has to-day been placed before us from the word of truth. 'Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?' So St. Paul, when on a missionary journey, inquires of some 'disciples' whom he met in the populous city of Ephesus: showing even by this, that only on an affirmative answer could he acknow-

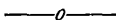
ledge them as genuine confessors of His Lord. Obviously he had his eye on the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit in the apostolic age, imparted to believers on the reception of Christian baptism; and it thus surprises us but little to hear from these disciples of John, who it would seem knew nothing of the marvel of Pentecost, a disappointing answer. But we, who are so much better informed than they, would our answer be more satisfactory if the question were given for our personal consideration? Considered in relation to the feast of Pentecost, it is equally difficult for us to comprehend its rich meaning as to perceive its importance, and each to find for himself the inevitable answer. The meaning cannot be, as some under the influence of excited feeling or a morbid imagination have supposed, Have we undergone the entirely exceptional operations of the Holy Ghost? but whether the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God and of Christ, really fills our heart, enlightens our understanding, governs our life; if there is in us a *new*, another and higher principle of life, than that which dwells in the man who is living without Christ; whether we yet remain entirely natural and carnal men, or are become in principle spiritual, and are really ever more and more seeking to show ourselves such. This is no question of curiosity, but of inconceivable importance; no question merely for the times of old, but for all times, and very clearly for the present; no mere question of the intellect, but having regard to the *life*, so long at least as for us as Christians the words of the apostle stand firm: 'Whoso hath not the Spirit of Christ cometh not to Him.' It is thus the question of being or seeming, of life or death, of riches or poverty, of condemnation or of pardon in the highest sphere of life: a question, moreover, in regard to which no one needs to remain in uncertainty as to the infallible reply. Indeed, according to the declaration of the same apostle, life is the work of the

Spirit ; where thus the Spirit really is, it is impossible but life too must show itself in such a manner as to separate us from those that walk in the lust of their eyes. 'The works of the flesh are manifest,' and we do not need to hear the enumeration (Gal. v. 19 and onwards) in order to know them, and from the fruit to judge of the plant.

But also the fruit of the Spirit, the glorious unity of all variety, cannot permanently remain hidden : these are, 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.' What need have we to go further than the life of the same man who first gave utterance to the question of the text, in order to see in a striking instance what it is to be filled with the Holy Ghost, and to allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit's influence ? Or is the measuring line too high for us ? Already a glance on these disciples of John shows us how essential is the difference between those who as yet have not received this grace, and those who have. The antecedents of these twelve are not further known to us, but this at least appears : only after they had received the Holy Ghost they began to speak with tongues and to prophesy (ver. 6). Their speech was changed because their hearts had become different, and their lives had received a new direction. Thus they became completely regenerate ; they see with other eyes, they praise with another tongue, they live in a higher sphere than that to which they had hitherto belonged. The principle of life, the aim, the duty, have in all who have been baptized with the Holy Ghost received a higher dedication than is the case with the children of the world. Oh, ye who frequently judge so uncharitably of others, what say ye on this point regarding yourselves ?

The reply does not need to be heard by any but the Searcher of hearts alone. The humble and thankful Yea of faith needs not to linger on the lips because it is accompanied by the perception of a thousand deficiencies.

Even the best Christian, whilst on earth, has not received the tithe, but only the first-fruits, of the Spirit ; but the Lord is faithful, and better is it certainly to tread, though with tottering feet, the way of life, than with firm steps to walk in the path of sin. Nevertheless, would the number be small of those who must bow the head in shame before this deeply humiliating reproach: 'Ye stiff-necked and disobedient, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost' ? Alas, how many in our times stand below these disciples of John, without having the same ground of excuse ! Assuredly we have long since heard that there is a Holy Spirit ; ah, that not one among us should any longer know Him merely by hearsay alone, but that the perception of our great and personal responsibility in the possession of such invaluable privileges may at last sink into our hearts in its full weight and importance ! May the question never receive this answer ! 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ?'



TWENTY-NINTH MAY.

'For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear ; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God : and if children, then heirs.'—ROM. viii. 15-17.

IF any one seriously doubted whether the Holy Ghost really may be called the most indispensable and desirable of gifts, the calm consideration of the 8th chapter of Romans may satisfy his misgiving. What vaunt of faith more sublime and beautiful than that which is here expressed ? and what privilege on earth can be named at the same time as that of being guided by the Spirit of God, and of being in truth His children ? The apostle brings us to feel something of

this, when in the text he makes us observe what the believer in Christ *escapes, enjoys, and expects.*

‘Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear,’—thus he writes ; and, indeed, if we who believe had no other privilege to boast, the ransomed sinner might on this account alone be called a happy man. Or is there a more painful position than that of the man who can no longer live without God, but can as little approach and look up to Him, because his heart is filled with slavish fear, because his conscience accuses him before the thrice-holy One? Could we but learn the hidden story of many a heart, what tones of fear, of distrust, of spite and malice even against God, would come before us! how many should we find whose position towards Him is no other than that of a slave towards a severe master! The old story is ever repeated when conscience cites us before Him: ‘I heard Thy voice; and I was afraid, and I hid myself.’

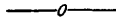
Ever, until it can be said of us in truth: ‘Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.’ Only when we really believe in Christ, and in His fellowship are filled with the Holy Ghost, are we assured on firm grounds of God’s fatherly love, and enjoy what the child alone sees prepared for him, but of which the slave cannot dream. Not *before*, but *after* we have come to Christ shall we be conscious of a filial relation to God, in which there is no room for anxious fear, but only for joyful trust, and by which it becomes to us a necessity and delight to take continually that dear Father’s name upon our lips, although we can as yet only repeat it stammeringly. Oh blessed, but, alas, too rare moments in the life of God’s children, when the door of the inner chamber is shut, and the veil which covered heaven from our sight begins to fall away, and when now the worshipper can comprehend what it says! Alone, and yet not alone: speaking out freely the thoughts

and vexations of the heart, but certain of a hearing from Him who is never weary of listening to the supplications of His children! There now beams a joy in the eye; there descends on the heart a peace such as thy child may feel when, perhaps weeping, it is laid in its father's arms, or in its mother's lap. The Abba within continues to re-echo there, in the midst of all the changes of this vain world; and when this confidence is lost through our own fault, it is to be found again, as at the first, after severe struggle, at the foot of the cross.

Or does the Christian deceive himself with a false persuasion, when he reckons so unconditionally on God's fatherly grace in Christ Jesus? But the apostle himself points to an inner ground of certainty, when he calls on the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the deepest consciousness of each one of the redeemed. 'The Spirit witnesseth with our spirit, that we are the children of God.' Evidently a sacred mystery is here referred to in the mind and life of faith, but still one which falls within the reach of the observation and experience of all believers, however imperfectly earthly language may be able to describe it. Concerning this witness of the Spirit, the pious Spener speaks thus: 'Of this very little can be spoken, for no one understands it except those who have felt it. It is like the new name in the book of Revelation, whom no one knows except those who receive it.' Enough: the Spirit who dwells in us as a *new* power of life, after we have come to Him, unites with our own inner consciousness, in order to give the most positive testimony concerning our filial relation to God. The feeling of peace, joy, and hope which penetrates the best hours of the Christian's life, he knows right well that he has had no share in procuring for himself, and the fruits of the Spirit are there as evidence that he is not deceiving himself with any false persuasion. Inner consciousness speaks truth, and the first-

fruits not merely presage, but at the same time guarantee the harvest.

And then, what an expectation! There is no earthly father who would disinherit his best-beloved child; but God's children, how should they be anything less than His future heirs? Here the eyes can only glimmer, the heart give thanks, the lips but stammer. Father, take from me or withhold whatever Thou seest meet, even what I value most, but only give me the best: that Spirit which has raised me to the rank of Thy child, and the heir of Thy kingdom!



THIRTIETH MAY.

'The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.'—I JOHN ii. 8.

THUS writes the venerable John, in order to excite his readers to consider seriously the command of love. By the darkness, he means the united power of error and sin, with all the misery resulting from these; and he declares not only that they are now wholly past, but that at the same moment an end is being put to all relation with them. Certainly 'the true light now shineth,'—literally, it *already* appears; it does not merely gleam in the distance, but has actually arisen. Thus he speaks, as we believe, not of the day of Christ's second coming, which he expected as close at hand, but of the light of truth and of grace in Him, through the gospel now arisen before the eyes of all who believe. A pregnant and bold declaration: do we say too much when we call it the key to St. John's apostolic contemplation of the world in the evening of a life full of trouble? If not, let us then immediately, with an eye on the festival recently celebrated, add that John's view of the world, after so many centuries have elapsed,

appears to us equally characterized by sublimity, justice, and power.

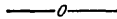
That light and darkness in the spiritual realm stand as far asunder as two extreme poles, will be doubted by no Christian; and in order that, as well in the great world without as in the little one within, the power of darkness may develop itself to a height causing perturbation, and actually developed, it does not require to be first called into existence. But now, all the darkness, even that which had previously assumed the name of light, is not merely fixed and appointed to pass away at some future time, but is in process of departing at this very time. From its nature, light, which already exists, not only remains unfadingly, but in and after the severest struggle with mist and cloud will conquer at last: is there not in this representation in itself something which may be called unspeakably sublime and encouraging?

Anything more beautiful we can scarcely imagine, and yet anything less we cannot possibly expect; and well may we desire that every view of the world maintained and justified itself as distinctly as this of the apostle prophet! Or is it not in the nature of the matter, whenever we believe in a holy God and an eternal destiny, that we perceive Him to be, as it were, the ally of light, so that in His domain darkness is constrained to yield? Is not the whole history of the establishment and extension, the reformation and continuance of God's kingdom, an eternal testimony to the truth of this declaration? Yea, is not every sinner who is inwardly renewed through the power of the Holy Ghost another evidence that the prospects of light are infinitely fairer than those of darkness? 'The darkness is passing away;' certainly it goes so slowly, that men might almost sigh: *It is creeping past.* Old errors, old sins, old miseries, which we believed were now entirely

eradicated, return in new forms. It is as in Nature, where the loveliness of the month of May is often interrupted by the stern face of winter: and 'the true light now shineth;' true, but at times as faintly, as beclouded, as cheerless, as if it had lost all its glow and splendour. Yet, if the heart is in truth upright before God, it cannot possibly so remain; the light which behind the clouds may appear to have sunk and to be extinguished, again throws aside the veil from its countenance, and it appears anew that darkness had but *time* before it, whilst light had *eternity*. Obviously in our day the prince of darkness is making his last effort at once against the kingdom of God and its subjects, but just the fierceness of his wrath evinces that he knoweth that he hath but a short time (Rev. xii. 12); and where weak faith sighs, 'It is now evening,' belief perceives already from afar the dawn of an eternal morning. Assuredly, the darkness hangs yet heavy as lead on many a mountain-top; it is at first difficult to remove from the path, and disinclined to yield; but yet, though it may be fitfully that progress is made, it shall at last pass entirely away, as certainly as Pentecost is the feast of light. What! do men say that the gospel grows old, and already has lost for ever its world-reviving power? Thou fool, who maintainest this! thou art old in thy hackneyed prejudices, but the gospel bears within itself a living power which thou art incapable of comprehending!

It merely remains to show forth the *power* of the apostolic view of the world to the comfort and sanctification of ourselves and many more, so that no contradiction may longer find entrance. We require no new pouring forth of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit has once for all descended at the feast of Pentecost, and we live in the latter days; but it thence follows, that we learn to understand and to use better that which God has really already given us in Christ. The true light

now shineth ; but, not to speak of the totally blind, even in living congregations there are many dim of vision. And something further. Many let the light, indeed, fall on the front door, the sitting-room, the bed-chamber, and the workshop ; but there is an apartment in the house of which the windows remain closed, and the owner himself keeps the key, because there is an idol hid within. Oh, ye whom this concerns, let the true light at last in at the window, and give the key of the secret chamber unconditionally into the hands of Jesus !



THIRTY-FIRST MAY.

‘Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby Thou didst confirm
Thine inheritance when it was weary.’—Ps. lxxviii. 9.

THUS sang Israel, when at a period of festival they looked back on the great works of God, which they constantly remembered with gratitude. Before their memory arose the smoking Sinai in the barren wilderness ; but along with this, the bountiful refreshment, like abundant rain after the scorching sun, with which the Lord had rejoiced His people, and strengthened their exhausted powers to press forward to the Land of Promise. May not we too, at the end of the week of Pentecost, repeat this same declaration, when we meditate on what we have heard of the promise and gift of the Holy Ghost, so frequently and with so much justice compared in the gospel of the Scriptures to a copious and fertilizing rain ? In truth, we have not merely seen, but tasted that the Lord is bounteous in tender mercy towards the heart that seeks Him in sincerity ; we have no smaller cause of thankfulness than that of which Israel speaks, for we have seen as great a want supplied, as striking a revelation granted, as glorious an

expectation opened, as formerly to the countless host who, refreshed by a tender rain, set forth through the desert to Canaan. What is more, since God's spiritual gift in Christ infinitely surpasses its most striking emblem, so there may at the present day be in us something of the feeling with which Paul once thankfully exclaimed, 'I have all, and abound,' and which caused the pious German hymn-writer of the seventeenth century, who died this same day of May,¹ to say with deepest feeling :

' Praise now the Lord, who by His word thy way hath still
 maintained !
 Who from on high most bounteously hath grace upon thee rained !
 Think ever on
 What might hath done
 That life might be attained !'

How utterly weary would the pilgrim to the heavenly Canaan become, if he were not refreshed by the rain of the Spirit, the full enjoyment of which, God be thanked, is not confined to a single day or a single week ! Our Christian festivals, as has been frequently remarked, are the glittering mountain-tops to which the Lord ever brings His people again, in order, as from another Nebo, to show them the Land of Promise. And now, not a single summit alone, the entire mountain-chain lies again behind us, and we look down on the great and glorious whole, whilst the words, 'Thou hast confirmed Thine inheritance when it was weary,' must once more fall from our lips. A threefold revelation of the glory of God has passed before our eyes ; and as He did to Moses of old, the Infinite One has declared His marvellous name aloud unto our reverently attentive ear. Christmas Eve is now past ; but by the light reflected to

¹ *Jochim Neander* died 31st May 1680, preacher at Bremen ; from him the celebrated *Neander Caves* near Elberfeld have received their name.

us from heaven we perceived the love of the Father, who spared not even His Son, His only Son, for the salvation of our souls. The Easter sun arose, and by its beams we perceived the Conqueror of death, who, after He was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, arose for our justification, having Himself made atonement for our sins, and is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. The flame of Pentecost sparkled, and on the wings of the mighty wind sounded forth from heaven this word to us: 'Lo, I make all things new, round about, and for and in you!' and we bowed the head and worshipped. Nay, verily, there is nothing more to be done in the vineyard of the Lord which He hath not done in it. 'Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance when it was weary!' And what especially may not be overlooked, all these bountiful gifts are at the same time prophetic; the rain of the desert is a pledge of the living water of Canaan. What is then wanting to us, when it is again so clearly manifested to us how great is the salvation of the Lord; and we who have contemplated it from the first day of Advent to the last of the week of Pentecost; we, who can to-day vaunt this salvation whilst so many since the opening of the first series of festivals have gone hence, what can we do less than repeat with the psalmist: 'He that is our God is the God of salvation; the God of Israel is He that giveth strength and power unto His people. Blessed be God?' It is thus, when now the Sun of revelation beams on us in full splendour, dark clouds are not absent; the highest mountains, from the nature of things, cast the broadest shadows. But yet, for all our three great circles of festivals, the centre is one and the same—the name of Him, who is, and who was, and who is to come: God above us, and with us, and in us, to whom be glory and honour through eternity. Of His glory we have seen

at least something, though it may be with glimmering eyes; and the conclusion to all the thoughts and questions of the 'refreshed heirs' always reverts to the declaration of the apostle: 'Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!'

'For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be glory for ever!'



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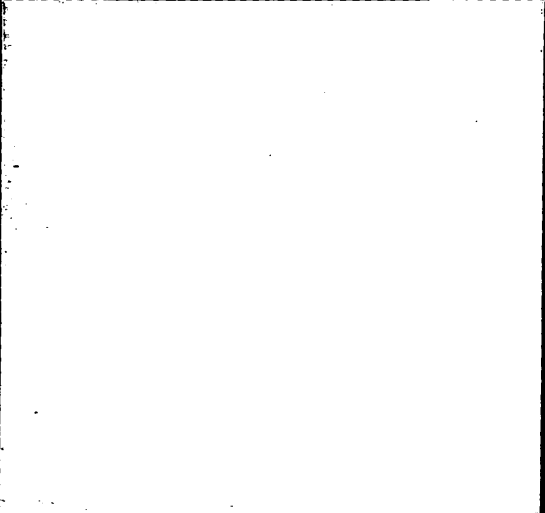
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