

The Good News of God

Charles Kingsley

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Title: The Good News of God

Author: Charles Kingsley

Release Date: December, 2004 [EBook #7051]
[This file was first posted on March 2, 2003]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK, THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD *****

Transcribed from the 1887 Macmillan and Co. edition by David Price,
email ccx074@coventry.ac.uk

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SERMON I. THE BEATIFIC VISION

MATTHEW xxii. 27.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

These words often puzzle and pain really good people, because they seem to put the hardest duty first. It seems, at times, so much more easy to love one's neighbour than to love God. And strange as it may seem, that is partly true. St. John tells us so--'He that loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' Therefore many good people, who really do love God, are unhappy at times because they feel that they do not love him enough. They say in their hearts--'I wish to do right, and I try to do it: but I am afraid I do not do it from love to God.'

I think that they are often too hard upon themselves. I believe that they are very often loving God with their whole hearts, when they think that they are not doing so. But still, it is well to be afraid of oneself, and dissatisfied with oneself.

I think, too--nay, I am certain--that many good people do not love God as they ought, and as they would wish to do, because they have not been rightly taught who God is, and what He is like. They have not been taught that God is loveable; they have been taught that God feels feelings, and does deeds, which if a man felt, or did, we should call him arbitrary, proud, revengeful, cruel: and yet they are told to love him; and they do not know how to love such a being as that. Nor do I either, my friends.

Let us therefore think over to-day for ourselves why we ought to love God; and why both Bible and Catechism bid child as well as man to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds, before they bid us love our neighbours. And keep this in mind all through, that the reason why we are to love God must depend upon what God's character is. For you cannot love any one because you are told to love them. You can only love them because they are loveable and worthy of your love. And that they will not be, unless they are loving themselves; as it is written, we love God because he first loved us.

Now, friends, look at this one thing first. When we see any man do a just action, or a kind action, do we not like to see it? Do we not like the man the better for doing it? A man must be sunk very low in stupidity and ill-feeling--dead in trespasses and sins, as the Bible calls it--if he does not. Indeed, I never saw the man yet, however bad he was himself, who did not, in his better moments, admire what was right and good; and say, 'Bad as I may be, that man is a good man, and I wish I could do as he does.'

One sees the same, but far more strongly, in little children. From their earliest years, as far as I have ever seen, children like and admire what is good, even though they be naughty themselves; and if

you tell them of any very loving, generous, or brave action, their hearts leap up in answer to it. They feel at once how beautiful goodness is.

But why?

St. John tells us. That feeling comes, he tells us, from Christ, the light who is the life of men, and lights every man who comes into the world; and that light in our hearts, which makes us see, and admire, and love what is good, is none other than Christ himself shining in our hearts, and showing to us his own likeness, and the beauty thereof.

But if we stop there; if we only admire what is good, without trying to copy it, we shall lose that light. Our corrupt and diseased nature (and corrupt and diseased it is, as we shall surely find, as soon as we begin to try to do right) will quench that heavenly spark in us more and more, till it dies out--as God forbid that it should die out in any of us. For if it did die out, we should care no more for what is good. We should see nothing beautiful, and noble, and glorious, in being just, and loving, and merciful. And then, indeed, we should see nothing worth loving in God himself:- and it were better for us that we had never been born.

But none of us, I trust, are fallen as low as that. We all, surely, admire a good action, and love a good man. Surely we do. Then I will go on, to ask you one question more.

Did it ever strike you, that goodness is not merely A beautiful thing, but THE beautiful thing--by far the most beautiful thing in the world; and that badness is not merely AN ugly thing, but the ugliest thing in the world?--So that nothing is to be compared for value with goodness; that riches, honour, power, pleasure, learning, the whole world and all in it, are not worth having, in comparison with being good; and the utterly best thing for a man is to be good, even though he were never to be rewarded for it: and the utterly worst thing for a man is to be bad, even though he were never to be punished for it; and, in a word, goodness is the only thing worth loving, and badness the only thing worth hating.

Did you ever feel this, my friends? Happy are those among you who have felt it; for of you the Lord says, Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. Ay, happy are you who have felt it; for it is the sign, the very and true sign, that the Holy Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of goodness, is working in your hearts with power, revealing to you the exceeding beauty of holiness, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

But did it never strike you besides, that goodness was one, and everlasting? Let me explain what I mean.

Did you never see, that all good men show their goodness in the same way, by doing the same kind of good actions? Let them be English or French, black or white, if they be good, there is the same honesty, the same truthfulness, the same love, the same mercy in all; and what is right and good for you and me, now and here, is right and good for every man, everywhere, and at all times for ever. Surely, surely, what is noble, and loveable, and admirable now, was so five thousand years ago, and will be five thousand years hence. What is honourable

for us here, would be equally honourable for us in America or Australia--ay, or in the farthest star in the skies.

But, some of you may say, men at different times and in different countries have had very different notions--indeed quite opposite notions, of what men ought to be.

I know that some people say so. I can only answer that I differ from them. True, some men have had less light than others, and, God knows, have made fearful mistakes enough, and fancied that they could please God by behaving like devils: but on the first principles of goodness, all the world has been pretty well agreed all along; for wherever men have been taught what is really right, there have been plenty of hearts to answer, 'Yes, this is good! this is what we have wanted all along, though we knew it not.' And all the wisest men among the heathen--the men who have been honoured, and even worshipped as blessings to their fellow men, have agreed, one and all, in the great and golden rule, 'Thou shalt love God, with all thy heart and soul, and thy neighbour as thyself.'

Believe about this as you may, my friends, still I believe, and will believe; I preach, and will preach, this, and nought else but this:- That there is but one everlasting goodness, which is good in men, good in all rational beings--yea, good in God himself.

These last are solemn words, but they are true; and the more you think over them, the more, I tell you, will you find them true. And to them I have been trying to lead you; and will try once more.

For, did it never strike you, again--as it has me--and all the world has looked different to me since I found it out--that there must be ONE, in whom all goodness is gathered together; ONE, who must be perfectly and absolutely good? And did it never strike you, that all the goodness in the world must, in some way or other, come from HIM? I believe that our hearts and reasons, if we will listen fairly to them, tell us that it must be so; and I am certain that the Bible tells us so, from beginning to end. When we see the million rain-drops of the shower, we say, with reason, there must be one great sea from which all these drops have come. When we see the countless rays of light, we say, with reason, there must be one great central sun from which all these are shed forth. And when we see, as it were, countless drops, and countless rays of goodness scattered about in the world, a little good in this man, and a little good in that, shall we not say, there must be one great sea, one central sun of goodness, from whence all human goodness comes? And where can that centre of goodness be, but in the very character of God himself?

Yes, my friends; if you would know what God is, think of all the noble, beautiful, loveable actions, tempers, feelings, which you ever saw or heard of. Think of all the good, and admirable, and loveable people whom you ever met; and fancy to yourselves all that goodness, nobleness, admirableness, loveableness, and millions of times more, gathered together in one, to make one perfectly good character--and then you have some faint notion of God, some dim sight of God, who is the eternal and perfect Goodness.

It is but a faint notion, no doubt, that the best man can have of God's goodness, so dull has sin made our hearts and brains: but let us comfort ourselves with this thought--That the more we learn to

love what is good, the more we accustom ourselves to think of good people and good things, and to ask ourselves why and how this action and that is good, the more shall we be able to see the goodness of God. And to see that, even for a moment, is worth all sights in earth or heaven.

Worth all sights, indeed. No wonder that the saints of old called it the 'Beatific Vision,' that is, the sight which makes a man utterly blessed; namely, to see, if but for a moment, with his mind's eye what God is like, and behold he is utterly good!

No wonder that they said (and I doubt not that they spoke honestly and simply what they felt) that while that thought was before them, this world was utterly nothing to them; that they were as men in a dream, or dead, not caring to eat or to move, for fear of losing that glorious thought; but felt as if they were (as they were most really and truly) caught up into heaven, and taken utterly out of themselves by the beauty and glory of God's perfect goodness. No wonder that they cried out with David, 'Whom have I in heaven, O Lord, but Thee? and there is none on earth whom I desire in comparison of Thee.' No wonder that they said with St. Peter when he saw our Lord's glory, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here,' and felt like men gazing upon some glorious picture or magnificent show, off which they cannot take their eyes; and which makes them forget for the time all beside in heaven and earth.

And it was good for them to be there: but not too long. Man was sent into this world not merely to see, but to do; and the more he sees, the more he is bound to go and do accordingly. St. Peter had to come down from the mount, and preach the Gospel wearily for many a year, and die at last upon the cross. St. Augustine, in like wise, though he would gladly have lived and died doing nothing but fixing his soul's eye steadily on the glory of God's goodness, had to come down from the mount likewise, and work, and preach, and teach, and wear himself out in daily drudgery for that God whom he learnt to serve, even when he could not adore Him in the press of business, and the bustle of a rotten and dying world.

But see, my dear friends, and consider it well--Before a man can come to that state of mind, or anything like it, he must have begun by loving goodness wherever he saw it; and have settled in his heart that to be good, and therefore to do good, is the most beautiful thing in the world. So he will begin by loving his brother whom he has seen, and by taking delight in good people, and in all honest, true, loving, merciful, generous words and actions, and in those who say and do them. And so he will be fit to love God, whom he has not seen, when he finds out (as God grant that you may all find out) that all goodness of which we can conceive, and far, far more, is gathered together in God, and flows out from him eternally over his whole creation, by that Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and is the Lord and Giver of life, and therefore of goodness. For goodness is nothing else, if you will receive it, but the eternal life of God, which he has lived, and lives now, and will live for evermore, God blessed for ever. Amen.

So, my dear friends, it will not be so difficult for you to love God, if you will only begin by loving goodness, which is God's likeness, and the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. For you will be like a man who has long admired a beautiful picture of some one whom he does not

know, and at last meets the person for whom the picture was meant-- and behold the living face is a thousand times more fair and noble than the painted one. You will be like a child which has been brought up from its birth in a room into which the sun never shone; and then goes out for the first time, and sees the sun in all his splendour bathing the earth with glory. If that child had loved to watch the dim narrow rays of light which shone into his dark room, what will he not feel at the sight of that sun from which all those rays had come Just so will they feel who, having loved goodness for its own sake, and loved their neighbours for the sake of what little goodness is in them, have their eyes opened at last to see all goodness, without flaw or failing, bound or end, in the character of God, which he has shown forth in Jesus Christ our Lord, who is the likeness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; to whom be glory and honour for ever. Amen.

SERMON II. THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

JOHN xvii. 1.

Father, the hour is come. Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. I spoke to you lately of the beatific vision of God. I will speak of it again to-day; and say this.

If any man wishes to see God, truly and fully, with the eyes of his soul: if any man wishes for that beatific vision of God; that perfect sight of God's perfect goodness; then must that man go, and sit down at the foot of Christ's cross, and look steadfastly upon him who hangs thereon. And there he will see, what the wisest and best among the heathen, among the Mussulmans, among all who are not Christian men, never have seen, and cannot see unto this day, however much they may feel (and some of them, thank God, do feel) that God is the Eternal Goodness, and must be loved accordingly.

And what shall we see upon the cross?

Many things, friends, and more than I, or all the preachers in the world, will be able to explain to you, though we preached till the end of the world. But one thing we shall see, if we will, which we have forgotten sadly, Christians though we be, in these very days; forgotten it, most of us, so utterly, that in order to bring you back to it, I must take a seemingly roundabout road.

Does it seem, or does it not seem, to you, that the finest thing in a man is magnanimity--what we call in plain English, greatness of soul? And if it does seem to you to be so, what do you mean by greatness of soul? When you speak of a great soul, and of a great man, what manner of man do you mean?

Do you mean a very clever man, a very far-sighted man, a very determined man, a very powerful man, and therefore a very successful man? A man who can manage everything, and every person whom he comes across, and turn and use them for his own ends, till he rises to be great and glorious--a ruler, king, or what you will?

Well--he is a great man: but I know a greater, and nobler, and more glorious stamp of man; and you do also. Let us try again, and think if we can find his likeness, and draw it for ourselves. Would he not be somewhat like this pattern?--A man who was aware that he had vast power, and yet used that power not for himself but for others; not for ambition, but for doing good? Surely the man who used his power for other people would be the greater-souled man, would he not? Let us go on, then, to find out more of his likeness. Would he be stern, or would he be tender? Would he be patient, or would he be fretful? Would he be a man who stands fiercely on his own rights, or would he be very careful of other men's rights, and very ready to waive his own rights gracefully and generously? Would he be extreme to mark what was done amiss against him, or would he be very patient when he was wronged himself, though indignant enough if he saw others wronged? Would he be one who easily lost his temper, and lost his head, and could be thrown off his balance by one foolish man? Surely not. He would be a man whom no fool, nor all fools together could throw off his balance; a man who could not lose his temper, could not lose his self-respect; a man who could bear with those who are peevish, make allowances for those who are weak and ignorant, forgive those who are insolent, and conquer those who are ungrateful, not by punishment, but by fresh kindness, overcoming their evil by his good.--A man, in short, whom no ill-usage without, and no ill-temper within, could shake out of his even path of generosity and benevolence. Is not that the truly magnanimous man; the great and royal soul? Is not that the stamp of man whom we should admire, if we met him on earth? Should we not reverence that man; esteem it an honour and a pleasure to work under that man, to take him for our teacher, our leader, in hopes that, by copying his example, our souls might become great like his?

Is it so, my friends? Then know this, that in admiring that man, you admire the likeness of God. In wishing to be like that man, you wish to be like God.

For this is God's true greatness; this is God's true glory; this is God's true royalty; the greatness, glory, and royalty of loving, forgiving, generous power, which pours itself out, untiring and undisturbed, in help and mercy to all which he has made; the glory of a Father who is perfect in this, that he causeth his rain to fall on the evil and on the good, and his sun to shine upon the just and on the unjust, and is good to the unthankful and the evil; a Father who has not dealt with us after our sins, or rewarded us after our iniquities: a Father who is not extreme to mark what is done amiss, but whom it is worth while to fear, for with him is mercy and plenteous redemption;--all this, and more--a Father who so loved a world which had forgotten him, a world whose sins must have been disgusting to him, that he spared not his only begotten Son, but freely gave him for us, and will with him freely give us all things; a Father, in one word, whose name and essence is love, even as it is the name and essence of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

This, my friends, is the glory of God: but this glory never shone out in its full splendour till it shone upon the cross.

For--that we may go back again, to that great-souled man, of whom I spoke just now--did we not leave out one thing in his character? or at least, one thing by which his character might be proved and tried? We said that he should be generous and forgiving; we said that he

should bear patiently folly, peevishness, ingratitude: but what if we asked of him, that he should sacrifice himself utterly for the peevish, ungrateful men for whose good he was toiling? What if we asked him to give up, for them, not only all which made life worth having, but to give up life itself? To die for them; and, what is bitterest of all, to die by their hands--to receive as their reward for all his goodness to them a shameful death? If he dare submit to that, then we should call his greatness of soul perfect. Magnanimity, we should say, could rise no higher; in that would be the perfection of goodness.

Surely your hearts answer, that this is true. When you hear of a father sacrificing his own life for his children; when you hear of a soldier dying for his country; when you hear of a clergyman or a physician killing himself by his work, while he is labouring to save the souls or the bodies of his fellow-creatures; then you feel--There is goodness in its highest shape. To give up our lives for others is one of the most beautiful, and noble, and glorious things on earth. But to give up our lives, willingly, joyfully for men who misunderstand us, hate us, despise us, is, if possible, a more glorious action still, and the very perfection of perfect virtue. Then, looking at Christ's cross, we see that, and even more--ay, far more than that. The cross was the perfect token of the perfect greatness of God, and of the perfect glory of God.

So on the cross, the Father justified himself to man; yea, glorified himself in the glory of his crucified Son. On the cross God proved himself to be perfectly just, perfectly good, perfectly generous, perfectly glorious, beyond all that man could ever have dared to conceive or dream. That God must be good, the wise heathens knew; but that God was so utterly good that he could stoop to suffer, to die, for men, and by men--that they never dreamed. That was the mystery of God's love, which was hid in Christ from the foundation of the world, and which was revealed at last upon the cross of Calvary by him who prayed for his murderers--'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' That truly blessed sight of a Saviour-God, who did not disdain to die the meanest and the most fearful of deaths--that, that came home at once, and has come home ever since, to all hearts which had left in them any love and respect for goodness, and melted them with the fire of divine love; as God grant it may melt yours, this day, and henceforth for ever.

I can say no more, my friends. If this good news does not come home to your hearts by its own power, it will never be brought home to you by any words of mine.

SERMON III. THE LIFE OF GOD

1 JOHN i. 2.

For the Life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested unto us!

What do we mean, when we speak of the Life everlasting?

Do we mean that men's souls are immortal, and will live for ever after death, either in happiness or misery?

We must mean more than that. At least we ought to mean more than that, if we be Christian men. For the Bible tells us, that Christ brought life and immortality to light. Therefore they must have been in darkness before Christ's coming; and men did not know as much about life and immortality before Christ's coming as they know--or ought to know--now.

But if we need only believe that we shall live for ever after death in happiness or misery, then Christ has not brought life and immortality to light. He has thrown no fresh light upon the matter.

And why? For this simple reason, that the old heathen knew as much as that before Christ came.

The old Greeks and Romans, and Persians, and our own forefathers before they became Christians, believed that men's souls would live for ever happy or miserable. The Mussulmans, Mahommedans, Turks as they are called in the Prayer-book, believe as much as that now. They believe that men's souls live for ever after death, and go to 'heaven' or 'hell.'

So those words 'everlasting Life' must needs mean something more than that. What do they mean?

First. What does everlasting mean?

It means exactly the same as eternal. The two words are the same: only everlasting is English, and eternal Latin. But they have the same sense.

Now everlasting and eternal mean something which has neither beginning nor end. That is certain. The wisest of the heathen knew that: but we are apt to forget it. We are apt to think a thing may be everlasting, because it has no end, though it has a beginning. We are careless thinkers, if we fancy that. God is eternal because he has neither beginning nor end.

But here come two puzzles.

First. The Athanasian Creed says that there is but one Eternal, that is, God; and never were truer words written.

But do we not make out two Eternals? For God is one Eternal; and eternal life is another Eternal. Now which is right; we, or the Athanasian Creed? I shall hold by the Athanasian Creed, my friends, and ask you to think again over the matter: thus--If there be but one Eternal, there is but one way of escaping out of our puzzle, which makes two Eternals; and that is, to go back to the old doctrine of St. Paul, and St. John, and the wisest of the Fathers, and say--There is but one Eternal; and therefore eternal life is in the Eternal God. And it is eternal Life because it is God's life; the life which God lives; and it is eternal just because, and only because, it is the life of God; and eternal death is nothing but the want of God's eternal life.

Certainly, whether you think this true or not, St. John thought it true; for he says so most positively in the text. He says that the Life was manifested--showed plainly upon earth, and that he had seen it. And he says that he saw it in a man, whom his eyes had seen, and his hands had handled. How could that be?

My friends, how else could it be? How can you see life, but by seeing some one live it? You cannot see a man's life, unless you see him live such and such a life, or hear of his living such and such a life, and so knowing what his life, manners, character, are. And so no one could have seen God's life, or known what life God lived, and what character God's was, had it not been for the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was made flesh, and dwelt among us, that by seeing him, the Son, we might see the Father, whose likeness he was, and is, and ever will be.

But now, says St. John, we know what God's eternal life is; for we know what Christ's life was on earth. And more, we know that it is a life which men may live; for Christ lived it perfectly and utterly, though He was a man.

What sort of life, then, is everlasting life?

Who can tell altogether and completely? And yet who cannot tell in part? Use the common sense, my friends, which God has given to you, and think;--If eternal life be the life of God, it must be a good life; for God is good. That is the first, and the most certain thing which we can say of it. It must be a righteous and just life; a loving and merciful life; for God is righteous, just, loving, merciful; and more, it must be an useful life, a life of good works; for God is eternally useful, doing good to all his creatures, working for ever for the benefit of all which he has made.

Yes--a life of good works. There is no good life without good works. When you talk of a man's life, you mean not only what he feels and thinks, but what he does. What is in his heart goes for nothing, unless he brings it out in his actions, as far as he can.

Therefore St. James says, 'Thou hast faith, and I have works. Shew me thy faith WITHOUT thy works,' (and who can do that?) 'and I will shew thee my faith by my works.'

And St. John says, there is no use SAYING you love. 'Let us love not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth;' and again--and would to God that most people who talk so glibly about heaven and hell, and the ways of getting thither, would recollect this one plain text--'Little children, let no man deceive you. He that DOETH righteousness is righteous, even as God is righteous.' And therefore it is that St. Paul bids rich men 'be rich also in noble deeds,' generous and liberal of their money to all who want, that they may 'lay hold of that which is really life,' namely, the eternal life of goodness.

And therefore also, my friends, we may be sure that God loves in deed and in truth: because it is written that God is love.

For if a man loves, he longs to help those whom he loves. It is the very essence of love, that it cannot be still, cannot be idle, cannot be satisfied with itself, cannot contain itself, but must go out to

do good to those whom it loves, to seek and to save that which is lost. And therefore God is perfect love, and his eternal life a life of eternal love, because he sends his Son eternally to seek and to save that which is lost.

This, then, is eternal life; a life of everlasting love showing itself in everlasting good works; and whosoever lives that life, he lives the life of God, and hath eternal life.

What I have just said will help you, I think, to understand another royal text about eternal life.

For now' we may understand why it is written, that this is life eternal, to know the true and only God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. For if eternal life be God's life, we must know God, and God's character, to know what eternal life is like: and if no man has seen God at any time, and God's life can only be seen in the life of Christ, then we must know Christ, and Christ's life, to know God and God's life; that the saying may be fulfilled in us, God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

One other royal text, did I say? We may understand many, perhaps all, the texts which speak of life, and eternal life, if we will look at them in this way. We may see why St. Paul says that to be spiritually minded is life; and that the life of Jesus may be manifested in men: and how the sin of the old heathen lay in this, that they were alienated from the life of God. We may understand how Christ's commandment is everlasting life; how the water which he gives, can spring up within a man's heart to everlasting life--all such texts we may, and shall, understand more and more, if we will bear in mind that everlasting life is the life of God and of Christ, a life of love; a life of perfect, active, self-sacrificing goodness, which is the one only true life for all rational beings, whether on earth or in heaven.

In heaven, my friends, as well as on earth. Form your own notions, as you will, about angels, and saints in heaven, for every one must have some notions about them, and try to picture to himself what the souls of those whom he has loved and lost are doing in the other world: but bear this in mind: that if the saints in heaven live the everlasting life, they must be living a life of usefulness, of love and of good works.

And here I must say, friends, that however much the Roman Catholics may be wrong on many points, they have remembered one thing about the life everlasting, which we are too apt to forget; and that is, that everlasting life cannot be a selfish, idle life, spent only in being happy oneself. They believe that the saints in heaven are NOT idle; that they are eternally helping mankind; doing all sorts of good offices for those souls who need them; that, as St. Paul says of the angels, they are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who are heirs of salvation. And I cannot see why they should not be right. For if the saints' delight was to do good on earth, much more will it be to do good in heaven. If they helped poor sufferers, if they taught the ignorant, if they comforted the afflicted, here on earth, much more will they be able, much more will they be willing, to help, comfort, teach them, now that they are in the full power, the full freedom, the full love and zeal of the everlasting life. If their hearts were warmed and softened by the fire of God's love here,

how much more there! If they lived God's life of love here, how much more there, before the throne of God, and the face of Christ!

But if any one shall say, that the souls of good men in heaven cannot help us who are here on earth, I answer, When did they ascend into heaven, to find out that? If they had ever been there, friends, be sure they would have had better news to bring home than this--that those whom we have honoured and loved on earth have lost the power which they used to have, of comforting us who are struggling here below. That notion springs altogether out of a superstitious fancy that heaven is a great many millions of miles away from this earth--which fancy, wherever men get it from, they certainly do not get it from the Bible. Moreover it seems to me, that if the saints in heaven cannot help men, then they cannot be happy in heaven. Cannot be happy? Ay, must be miserable. For what greater misery for really good men, than to see things going wrong, and not to be able to mend them; to see poor creatures suffering, and not to be able to comfort them? No, my friends, we will believe--what every one who loves a beloved friend comes sooner or later to believe--that those whom we have honoured and loved, though taken from our eyes, are near to our spirits; that they still fight for us, under the banner of their Master Christ, and still work for us, by virtue of his life of love, which they live in him and by him for ever.

Pray to them, indeed, we need not, as if they would help us out of any self-will of their own. There, I think, the Roman Catholics are wrong. They pray to the saints as if the saints had wills of their own, and fancies of their own, and were respecters of persons; and could have favourites, and grant private favours to those who especially admired and (I fear I must say it) flattered them. But why should we do that? That is to lower God's saints in our own eyes. For if we believe that they are made perfect, and like perfectly the everlasting life, then we must believe that there is no self-will in them: but that they do God's will, and not their own, and go on God's errands, and not their own; that he, and not their own liking, sends them whithersoever he wills; and that if we ask of HIM--of God our Father himself, that is enough for us.

And what shall we ask?

Ask--'Father, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.'

For in asking that, we ask for the best of all things. We ask for the happiness, the power, the glory of saints and angels. We ask to be put into tune with God's whole universe, from the meanest flower beneath our feet, to the most glorious spirit whom God ever created. We ask for the one everlasting life which can never die, fail, change, or disappoint: yea, for the everlasting life which Christ the only begotten Son lives from eternity to eternity, for ever saying to his Father, 'Thy will be done.'

Yes--when we ask God to make us do his will, then indeed we ask for everlasting life.

Does that seem little? Would you rather ask for all manner of pleasant things, if not in this life, at least in the life to come?

Oh, my friends, consider this. We were not put into this world to get pleasant things; and we shall not be put into the next world, as

it seems to me, to get pleasant things. We were put into this world to do God's will. And we shall be put (I believe) into the next world for the very same purpose--to do God's will; and if we do that, we shall find pleasure enough in doing it. I do not doubt that in the next world all manner of harmless pleasure will come to us likewise; because that will be, we hope, a perfect and a just world, not a piecemeal, confused, often unjust world, like this: but pleasant things will come to us in the next life, only in proportion as we shall be doing God's will in the next life; and we shall be happy and blessed, only because we shall be living that eternal life of which I have been preaching to you all along, the life which Christ lives and has lived and will live for ever, saying to the Eternal Father--I come to do thy will--not my will but thine be done.

Oh! may God give to us all his Spirit; the Spirit by which Christ did his Father's will, and lived his Father's life in the soul and body of a mortal man, that we may live here a life of obedience and of good works, which is the only true and living life of faith; and that when we die it may be said of us--'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.'

They rest from their labours. All their struggles, disappointments, failures, backslidings, which made them unhappy here, because they could not perfectly do the will of God, are past and over for ever. But their works follow them. The good which they did on earth--that is not past and over. It cannot die. It lives and grows for ever, following on in their path long after they are dead, and bearing fruit unto everlasting life, not only in them, but in men whom they never saw, and in generations yet unborn.

SERMON IV. THE SONG OF THE THREE CHILDREN

DANIEL iii. 16, 17, 18.

O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

We read this morning, instead of the Te Deum, the Song of the Three Children, beginning, 'Oh all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever.' It was proper to do so: because the Ananias, Azarias, and Misael mentioned in it, are the same as the Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, whose story we heard in the first lesson; and because some of the old Jews held that this noble hymn was composed by them, and sung by them in the burning fiery furnace, wherefore it has been called 'The Song of the Three Children;' for child, in old English, meant a young man.

Be that as it may, it is a glorious hymn, worthy of the Church of God, worthy of those three young men, worthy of all the noble army of martyrs; and if the three young men did not actually use the very words of it, still it was what they believed; and, because they

believed it, they had courage to tell Nebuchadnezzar that they were not careful to answer him--had no manner of doubt or anxiety whatsoever as to what they were to say, when he called on them to worship his gods. For his gods, we know, were the sun, moon, and planets, and the angels who (as the Chaldeans believed) ruled over the heavenly bodies; and that image of gold is supposed, by some learned men, to have been probably a sign or picture of the wondrous power of life and growth which there is in all earthly things--and that a sign of which I need not speak, or you hear. So that the meaning of this Song of the Three Children is simply this:

'You bid us worship the things about us, which we see with our bodily eyes. We answer, that we know the one true God, who made all these things; and that, therefore, instead of worshipping THEM, we will bid them to worship HIM.'

Now let us spend a few minutes in looking into this hymn, and seeing what it teaches us.

You see at once, that it says that the one God, and not many gods, made all things: much more, that things did not make themselves, or grow up of their own accord, by any virtue or life of their own.

But it says more. It calls upon all things which God has made, to bless him, praise him, and magnify him for ever. This is much more than merely saying, 'One God made the world.' For this is saying something about God's character; declaring what this one God is like.

For when you bless a person--(I do not mean when you pray God to bless him--that is a different thing)--when you bless any one, I say, you bless him because he is blessed, and has done blessed things: because he has shown himself good, generous, merciful, useful. You praise a person because he is praiseworthy, noble, and admirable. You magnify a person--that is, speak of him to every one, and everywhere, in the highest terms--because you think that every one ought to know how good and great he is. And, therefore, when the hymn says, 'Bless God, praise him, and magnify him for ever,' it does not merely confess God's power. No. It confesses, too, God's wisdom, goodness, beauty, love, and calls on all heaven and earth to admire him, the alone admirable, and adore him, the alone adorable.

For this is really to believe in God. Not merely to believe that there is a God, but to know what God is like, and to know that He is worthy to be believed in; worthy to be trusted, honoured, loved with heart and mind and soul, because we know that He is worthy of our love.

And this, we have a right to say, these three young men did, or whosoever wrote this hymn; and that as a reward for their faith in God, there was granted to them that deep insight into the meaning of the world about them, which shines out through every verse of this hymn.

Deep? I tell you, my friends, that this hymn is so deep, that it is too deep for the shallow brains of which the world is full now-a-days, who fancy that they know all about heaven and earth, just because they happen to have been born now, and not two hundred years ago. To such this old hymn means nothing; it is in their eyes merely an old-fashioned figure of speech to call on sun and stars, green

herb and creeping thing, to praise and bless God. Nevertheless, the old hymn stands in our prayer-books, as a precious heir-loom to our children; and long may it stand. Though we may forget its meaning, yet perhaps our children after us will recollect it once more, and say with their hearts, what we now, I fear, only say with our lips and should not say at all, if it was not put into our mouths by the Prayer-book.

Do you not understand what I mean? Then think of this:-

If we were writing a hymn about God, should we dare to say to the things about us--to the cattle feeding in the fields--much less to the clouds over our heads, and to the wells of which we drink, 'Bless ye the Lord, praise him, and magnify him for ever?'

We should not dare; and for two reasons.

First--There is a notion abroad, borrowed from the old monks, that this earth is in some way bad, and cursed; that a curse is on it still for man's sake: but a notion which is contrary to plain fact; for if we till the ground, it does NOT bring forth thorns and thistles to us, as the Scripture says it was to do for Adam, but wholesome food, and rich returns for our labour: and which in the next place is flatly contrary to Scripture: for we read in Genesis viii. 21, how the Lord said, 'I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake;' and the Psalms always speak of this earth, and of all created things, as if there was no curse at all on them; saying that 'all things serve God, and continue as they were at the beginning,' and that 'He has given them a law which cannot be broken;' and in the face of those words, let who will talk of the earth being cursed, I will not; and you shall not, if I can help it.

Another reason why we dare not talk of this earth as this hymn does is, that we have got into the habit of saying, 'Cattle and creeping things--they are not rational beings. How can they praise God? Clouds and wells--they are not even living things. How can they praise God? Why speak of them in a hymn; much less speak to them?'

Yet this hymn does speak to them; and so do the Psalms and the Prophets again and again. And so will men do hereafter, when the fashions and the fancies of these days are past, and men have their eyes opened once more to see the glory which is around them from their cradle to their grave, and hear once more 'The Word of the Lord walking among the trees of the garden.'

But how can this be? How can not only dumb things, but even dead things, praise God?

My friends, this is a great mystery, of which the wisest men as yet know but little, and confess freely how little they know. But this at least we know already, and can say boldly--all things praise God, by fulfilling the law which our Lord himself declared, when he said 'Not every one who saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.'

By doing the will of the heavenly Father. By obeying the laws which God has given them. By taking the shape which he has appointed for them. By being of the use for which he intended them. By

multiplying each after their kind, by laws and means a thousand times more strange than any signs and wonders of which man can fancy for himself; and by thus showing forth God's boundless wisdom, goodness, love, and tender care of all which he has made.

Yes, my friends, in this sense (and this is the true sense) all things can serve and praise God, and all things do serve and praise Him. Not a cloud which fleets across the sky, not a clod of earth which crumbles under the frost, not a blade of grass which breaks through the snow in spring, not a dead leaf which falls to the earth in autumn, but is doing God's work, and showing forth God's glory. Not a tiny insect, too small to be seen by human eyes without the help of a microscope, but is as fearfully and wonderfully made as you and me, and has its proper food, habitation, work, appointed for it, and not in vain. Nothing is idle, nothing is wasted, nothing goes wrong, in this wondrous world of God. The very scum upon the standing pool, which seems mere dirt and dust, is all alive, peopled by millions of creatures, each full of beauty, full of use, obeying laws of God too deep for us to do aught but dimly guess at them; and as men see deeper and deeper into the mystery of God's creation, they find in the commonest things about them wonder and glory, such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive; and can only say with the Psalmist, 'Oh Lord, thy ways are infinite, thy thoughts are very deep;' and confess that the grass beneath their feet, the clouds above their heads--ay, every worm beneath the sod and bird upon the bough, do, in very deed and truth, bless the Lord who made them, praise him, and magnify him for ever, not with words indeed, but with works; and say to man all day long, 'Go thou, and do likewise.'

Yes, my friends, let us go and do likewise. If we wish really to obey the lesson of the Hymn of the Three Children, let us do the will of God: and so worship him in spirit and in truth. Do not fancy, as too many do, that thou canst praise God by singing hymns to him in church once a week, and disobeying him all the week long, crying to him 'Lord, Lord,' and then living as if he were not thy Lord, but thou wast thine own Lord, and hadst a right to do thine own will, and not his. If thou wilt really bless God, then try to live his blessed life of Goodness. If thou wilt truly praise God, then behave as if God was praiseworthy, good, and right in what he bids thee do. If thou wouldest really magnify God, and declare his greatness, then behave as if he were indeed the Great God, who ought to be obeyed--ay, who MUST be obeyed; for his commandment is life, and it alone, to thee, as well as to all which He has made. Dost thou fancy as the heathen do, that God needs to be flattered with fine words? or that thou wilt be heard for thy much speaking, and thy vain repetitions? He asks of thee works, as well as words; and more, He asks of thee works first, and words after. And better it is to praise him truly by works without words, than falsely by words without works.

Cry, if thou wilt, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts;' but show that thou believest him to be holy, by being holy thyself. Sing, if Thou wilt, of 'The Father of an Infinite Majesty:' but show that thou believest his majesty to be infinite, by obeying his commandments, like those Three Children, let them cost thee what they may. Join, and join freely, in the songs of the heavenly host; for God has given thee reason and speech, after the likeness of his only begotten Son, and thou mayest use them, as well as every other gift, in the service of thy Father. But take care lest, while thou art trying to copy the

angels, thou art not even as righteous as the beasts of the field. For they bless and praise God by obeying his laws; and till thou dost that, and obeyest God's laws likewise, thou art not as good as the grass beneath thy feet.

For after all has been said and sung, my friends, the sum and substance of true religion remains what it was, and what it will be for ever; and lies in this one word, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments.'

SERMON V. THE ETERNAL GOODNESS

MATTHEW xxii. 39.

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Why are wrong things wrong? Why, for instance, is it wrong to steal?

Because God has forbidden it, you may answer. But is it so? Whatsoever God forbids must be wrong. But, is it wrong because God forbids it, or does God forbid it because it is wrong?

For instance, suppose that God had not forbidden us to steal, would it be right then to steal, or at least, not wrong?

We must really think of this. It is no mere question of words, it is a solemn practical question, which has to do with our every-day conduct, and yet which goes down to the deepest of all matters, even to the depths of God himself.

The question is simply this. Did God, who made all things, make right and wrong? Many people think so. They think that God made goodness. But how can that be? For if God made goodness, there could have been no goodness before God made it. That is clear. But God was always good, good from all eternity. But how could that be? How could God be good, before there was any goodness made? That notion will not do then. And all we can say is that goodness is eternal and everlasting, just as God is: because God was and is and ever will be eternally and always good.

But is eternal goodness one thing, and the eternal God, another? That cannot be, again; for as the Athanasian Creed tells us so wisely and well, there are not many Eternals, but one Eternal. Therefore goodness must be the Spirit of God; and God must be the Spirit of goodness; and right is nothing else but the character of the everlasting God, and of those who are inspired by God.

What is wrong, then? Whatever is unlike right; whatever is unlike goodness; whatever is unlike God; that is wrong. And why does God forbid us to do wrong? Simply because wrong is unlike himself. He is perfectly beautiful, perfectly blest and happy, because he is perfectly good; and he wishes to see all his creatures beautiful, blest, and happy: but they can only be so by being perfectly good; and they can only be perfectly good by being perfectly like God their Father; and they can only be perfectly like God the Father by being

full of love, loving their neighbour as themselves.

For what do we mean when we talk of right, righteousness, goodness?

Many answers have been given to that question.

The old Romans, who were a stern, legal-minded people, used to say that righteousness meant to hurt no man, and to give every man his own. The Eastern people had a better answer still, which our blessed Lord used in one place, when he told them that righteousness was to do to other people as we would they should do to us: but the best answer, the perfect answer, is our Lord's in the text, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' This is the true, eternal righteousness. Not a legal righteousness, not a righteousness made up of forms and ceremonies, of keeping days holy, and abstaining from meats, or any other arbitrary commands, whether of God or of man. This is God's goodness, God's righteousness, Christ's own goodness and righteousness. Do you not see what I mean? Remember only one word of St. John's. God is love. Love is the goodness of God. God is perfectly good, because he is perfect love. Then if you are full of love, you are good with the same goodness with which God is good, and righteous with Christ's righteousness. That as what St. Paul wished to be, when he wished to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is by faith in Christ. His own righteousness was the selfish and self-conceited righteousness which he had before his conversion, made up of forms, and ceremonies, and doctrines, which made him narrow-hearted, bigoted, self-conceited, fierce, cruel, a persecutor; the righteousness which made him stand by in cold blood to see St. Stephen stoned. But the righteousness which is by faith in Christ is a loving heart, and a loving life, which every man will long to lead who believes really in Jesus Christ. For when he looks at Christ, Christ's humiliation, Christ's work, Christ's agony, Christ's death, and sees in it nothing but utter and perfect LOVE to poor sinful, undeserving man, then his heart makes answer, Yes, I believe in that! I believe and am sure that that is the most beautiful character in the world; that that is the utterly noble and right sort of person to be--full of love as Christ was. I ought to be like that. My conscience tells me that I ought. And I can be like that. Christ, who was so good himself, must wish to make me good like himself, and I can trust him to do it. I can have faith in him, that he will make me like himself, full of the Spirit of love, without which I shall be only useless and miserable. And I trust him enough to be sure that, good as he is, he cannot mean to leave me useless or miserable. So, by true faith in Christ, the man comes to have Christ's righteousness--that is, to be loving as Christ was. He believes that Christ's loving character is perfect beauty; that he must be the Son of God, if his character be like that. He believes that Christ can and will fill him with the same spirit of love; and as he believes, so is it with him, and in him those words are fulfilled, 'Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God;' and that 'If a man love me,' says the Lord, 'I and my Father will come to him, and take up our abode with him.' Those are wonderful words: but if you will recollect what I have just said, you may understand a little of them. St. John puts the same thing very simply, but very boldly. 'God is Love,' he says, 'and he that

dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.' Strange as it may seem, it must be so if God be love. Let us thank God that it is

true, and keep in mind what awful and wonderful creatures we are, that God should dwell in us; what blessed and glorious creatures we may become in time, if we will only listen to the voice of God who speaks within our hearts.

And what does that voice say? The old commandment, my friends, which was from the beginning, 'Love one another.' Whatever thoughts or feeling in your hearts contradict that; whatever tempts you to despise your neighbour, to be angry with him, to suspect him, to fancy him shut out from God's love, that is not of God. No voice in our hearts is God's voice, but what says in some shape or other, 'Love thy neighbour as thyself. Care for him, bear with him long, and try to do him good.'

For love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love. Still less can he who is not loving fulfil the law; for the law of God is the very pattern and picture of God's character; and if a man does not know what God is like, he will never know what God's law is like; and though he may read his Bible all day long, he will learn no more from it than a dumb animal will, unless his heart is full of love. For love is the light by which we see God, by which we understand his Bible; by which we understand our duty, and God's dealings, in the world. Love is the light by which we understand our own hearts; by which we understand our neighbours' hearts. So it is. If you hate any man, or have a spite against him, you will never know what is in that man's heart, never be able to form a just opinion of his character. If you want to understand human beings, or to do justice to their feelings, you must begin by loving them heartily and freely, and the more you like them the better you will understand them, and in general the better you will find them to be at heart, the more worthy of your trust, at least the more worthy of your compassion.

At least, so St. John says, 'He that saith he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness even till now, and knoweth not whither he goeth. But he that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him.'

No occasion of stumbling. That is of making mistakes in our behaviour to our neighbours, which cause scandal, drive them from us, and make them suspect us, dislike us--and perhaps with too good reason. Just think for yourselves. What does half the misery, and all the quarrelling in the world come from, but from people's loving themselves better than their neighbours? Would children be disobedient and neglectful to their parents, if they did not love themselves better than their parents? Why does a man kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, covet his neighbour's goods, his neighbour's custom, his neighbour's rights, but because he loves his own pleasure or interest better than his neighbour's, loves himself better than the man whom he wrongs? Would a man take advantage of his neighbour if he loved him as well as himself? Would he be hard on his neighbour, and say, Pay me the uttermost farthing, if he loved him as he loves himself? Would he speak evil of his neighbour behind his back, if he loved him as himself? Would he cross his neighbour's temper, just because he WILL have his own way, right or wrong, if he loved him as himself? Judge for yourselves. What would the world become like this moment if every man loved his neighbour as himself, thought of his neighbour as much as he thinks of himself? Would it

not become heaven on earth at once? There would be no need then for soldiers and policemen, lawyers, rates and taxes, my friends, and all the expensive and heavy machinery which is now needed to force people into keeping something of God's law. Ay, there would be no need of sermons, preachers and prophets to tell men of God's law, and warn them of the misery of breaking it. They would keep the law of their own free-will, by love. For love is the fulfilling of the law; and as St. Augustine says, 'Love you neighbour, and then do what you will--because you will be sure to will what is right.' So truly did our Lord say, that on this one commandment hung all the law and the prophets.

But though that blessed state of things will not come to the whole world till the day when Christ shall reign in that new heaven and new earth, in which Righteousness shall dwell, still it may come here, now, on earth, to each and every one of us, if we will but ask from God the blessed gift; to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

And then, my friends, whether we be rich or poor, fortunate or unfortunate, still that spirit of Love which is the Spirit of God, will be its exceeding great reward.

I say, its own reward.

For what is to be our reward, if we do our duty earnestly, however imperfectly? 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'

And what is the joy of our Lord? What is the joy of Christ? The joy and delight which springs for ever in his great heart, from feeling that he is for ever doing good; from loving all, and living for all; from knowing that if not all, yet millions on millions are grateful to him, and will be for ever.

My friends, if you have ever done a kind action; if you have ever helped any one in distress, or given up a pleasure for the sake of others--do you not know that that deed gave you a peace, a self-content, a joy for the moment at least, which nothing in this world could give, or take away? And if the person whom you helped thanked you; if you felt that you had made that man your friend; that he trusted you now, looked on you now as a brother--did not that double the pleasure? I ask you, is there any pleasure in the world like that of doing good, and being thanked for it? Then that is the joy of your Lord. That is the joy of Christ rising up in you, as often as you do good; the love which is in you rejoicing in itself, because it has found a loving thing to do, and has called out the love of a human being in return.

Yes, if you will receive it, that is the joy of Christ--the glorious knowledge that he is doing endless good, and calling out endless love to himself and to the Father, till the day when he shall give up to his Father the kingdom which he has won back from sin and death, and God shall be all in all.

That is the joy of your Lord. If you wish for any different sort of joy after you die, you must not ask me to tell you of it; for I know nothing about the matter save what I find written in the Holy Scripture.

SERMON VI. WORSHIP

ISAIAH i. 12, 13.

When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

This is a very awful text; one of those which terrify us--or at least ought to terrify us--and set us on asking ourselves seriously and honestly--'What do I believe after all? What manner of man am I after all? What sort of show should I make after all, if the people round me knew my heart and all my secret thoughts? What sort of show, then, do I already make, in the sight of Almighty God, who sees every man exactly as he is?'

I say, such texts as this ought to terrify us. It is good to be terrified now and then; to be startled, and called to account, and set thinking, and sobered, as it were, now and then, that we may look at ourselves honestly and bravely, and see, if we can, what sort of men we are.

And therefore, perhaps, it is that this chapter is chosen for the first Advent Lesson; to prepare us for Christmas; to frighten us somewhat; at least to set us thinking seriously, and to make us fit to keep Christmas in spirit and in truth.

For whom does this text speak of?

It speaks of religious people, and of a religious nation; and of a fearful mistake which they were making, and a fearful danger into which they had fallen. Now we are religious people, and England is a religious nation; and therefore we may possibly make the same mistake, and fall into the same danger, as these old Jews.

I do not say that we have done so; but we may; for human nature is just the same now as it was then; and therefore it is as well for us to look round--at least once now and then, and see whether we too are in danger of falling, while we think that we are standing safe.

What does Isaiah, then, tell the religious Jews of his day?

That their worship of God, their church-going, their sabbaths, and their appointed feasts were a weariness and an abomination to him. That God loathed them, and would not listen to the prayers which were made in them. That the whole matter was a mockery and a lie in his sight.

These are awful words enough--that God should hate and loathe what he himself had appointed; that what would be, one would think, one of the most natural and most pleasant sights to a loving Father in heaven--namely, his own children worshipping, blessing, and praising him--should be horrible in his sight. There is something very

shocking in that; at least to Church people like us. If we were Dissenters, who go to chapel chiefly to hear sermons, it would be easy for us to say--'Of course, forms and ceremonies and appointed feasts are nothing to begin with; they are man's invention at best, and may therefore be easily enough an abomination to God.' But we know that they are not so; that forms and ceremonies and appointed feasts are good things as long as they have spirit and truth in them; that whether or not they be of man's invention, they spring out of the most simple, wholesome wants of our human nature, which is a good thing and not a bad one, for God made it in his own likeness, and bestowed it on us. We know, or ought to know, that appointed feast days, like Christmas, are good and comfortable ordinances, which cheer our hearts on our way through this world, and give us something noble and lovely to look forward to month after month; that they are like landmarks along the road of life, reminding us of what God has done, and is doing, for us and all mankind. And if you do not know, I know, that people who throw away ordinances and festivals end, at least in a generation or two, in throwing away the Gospel truth which that ordinance or festival reminds us of; just as too many who have thrown away Good Friday have thrown away the Good Friday good news, that Christ died for all mankind; and too many who have thrown away Christmas are throwing away--often without meaning to do so--the Christmas good news, that Christ really took on himself the whole of our human nature, and took the manhood into God.

So it is, my friends, and so it will be. For these forms and festivals are the old landmarks and beacons of the Gospel; and if a man will not look at the landmarks, then he will lose his way.

Therefore, to Church people like us, it ought to be a shocking thing even to suspect that God may be saying to us, 'Your appointed feasts my soul hateth;' and it ought to set them seriously thinking how such a thing may happen, that they may guard against it. For if God be not pleased with our coming to his house, what right have we in his house at all?

But recollect this, my dear friends, that we are not to use this text to search and judge others' faults, but to search and judge our own.

For if a man, hearing this sermon, looks at his neighbour across the church, and says in his heart, 'Ay, such a bad one as he is--what right has he in church?'--then God answers that man, 'Who art thou who judgest another? To his own master he standeth or falleth.' Yes, my friends, recollect what the old tomb-stone outside says--(and right good doctrine it is)--and fit it to this sermon.

When this you see, pray judge not me
For sin enough I own.
Judge yourselves; mend your lives;
Leave other folks alone.

But if a man, hearing this sermon, begins to say to himself, Such a man as I am--so full of faults as I am--what right have I in church? So selfish--so uncharitable--so worldly--so useless--so unfair (or whatever other faults the man may feel guilty of)--in one word, so unlike what I ought to be--so unlike Christ--so unlike God whom I

come to worship. How little I act up to what I believe! how little I really believe what I have learnt! what right have I in church? What if God were saying the same of me as he said of those old Jews, 'Thy church-going, thy coming to communion, thy Christmas-day, my soul hateth; I am weary to bear it. Who hath required this at thy hands, to tread my courts?' People round me may think me good enough as men go now; but I know myself too well; and I know that instead of saying with the Pharisee to any man here, 'I thank God that I am not as this man or that,' I ought rather to stand afar off like the publican, and not lift up so much as my eyes toward heaven, crying only 'God, be merciful to me a sinner.'

If a man should think thus, my friends, his thoughts may make him very serious for awhile; nay, very sad. But they need not make him miserable: need still less make him despair.

They ought to set him on thinking--Why do I come to church?

Because it is the fashion?

Because I want to hear the preacher?

No--to worship God.

But what is worshipping God?

That must depend entirely my friends, upon who God is.

As I often tell you, most questions--ay, if you will receive it, all questions--depend upon this one root question, who is God?

But certainly this question of worshipping God must depend upon who God is. For how he ought to be worshipped depends on what will please him. And what will please him, depends on what his character is.

If God be, as some fancy, hard and arbitrary, then you must worship him in a way in which a hard arbitrary person would like to be addressed; with all crouching, and cringing, and slavish terror.

If God be again, as some fancy, cold, and hard of hearing, then you must worship him accordingly. You must cry aloud as Baal's priests did to catch his notice, and put yourselves to torment (as they did, and as many a Christian has done since) to move his pity; and you must use repetitions as the heathen do, and believe that you will be heard for your much speaking. The Lord Jesus called all such repetitions vain, and much speaking a fancy: but then, the Lord Jesus spoke to men of a Father in heaven, a very different God from such as I speak of--and, alas! some Christian people believe in.

But, my friends, if you believe in your heavenly Father, the good God whom your Lord Jesus Christ has revealed to you; and if you will consider that he is good, and consider what that word good means, then you will not have far to seek before you find what worship means, and how you can worship him in spirit and in truth.

For if God be good, worshipping him must mean praising and admiring him--adoring him, as we call it--for being good.

And nothing more?

Certainly much more. Also to ask him to make us good. That, too, must be a part of worshipping a good God. For the very property of goodness is, that it wishes to make others good. And if God be good, he must wish to make us good also.

To adore God, then, for his goodness, and to pray to him to make us good, is the sum and substance of all wholesome worship.

And for that purpose a man may come to church, and worship God in spirit and in truth, though he be dissatisfied with himself, and ashamed of himself; and knows that he is wrong in many things:- provided always that he wishes to be set right, and made good.

For he may come saying, 'O God, thou art good, and I am bad; and for that very reason I come. I come to be made good. I admire thy goodness, and I long to copy it; but I cannot unless thou help me. Purge me; make me clean. Cleanse thou me from my secret faults, and give me truth in the inward parts. Do what thou wilt with me. Train me as thou wilt. Punish me if it be necessary. Only make me good.'

Then is the man fit indeed to come to church, sins and all:- if he carry his sins into church not to carry them out again safely and carefully, as we are all too apt to do, but to cast them down at the foot of Christ's cross, in the hope (and no man ever hoped that hope in vain)--that he will be lightened of that burden, and leave some of them at least behind him. Ay, no man, I say, ever hoped that in vain. No man ever yet felt the burden of his sins really intolerable and unbearable, but what the burden of his sins was taken off him before all was over, and Christ's righteousness given to him instead.

Then a man is fit, not only to come to church, but to come to Holy Communion on Christmas-day, and all days. For then and there he will find put into words for him the very deepest sorrows and longings of his heart. There he may say as heartily as he can (and the more heartily the better), 'I acknowledge and bewail my manifold sins and wickedness. The remembrance of them is grievous unto me; the burden of them is intolerable:' but there he will hear Christ promising in return to pardon and deliver him from all his sins, to confirm and strengthen him in all goodness. That last is what he ought to want; and if he wants it, he will surely find it.

He may join there with the whole universe of God in crying, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory:' and still in the same breath he may confess again his unworthiness so much as to gather up the crumbs under God's table, and cast himself simply and utterly upon the eternal property of God's eternal essence, which is--always to have mercy. But he will hear forthwith Christ's own answer--'If thou art bad, I can and will make thee good. My blood shall wash away thy sin: my body shall preserve thee, body, soul, and spirit, to the everlasting life of goodness.'

And so God will bless that man's communion to him; and bless to him his keeping of Christmas-day; because out of a true penitent heart and lively faith he will be offering to the good God the sacrifice of his own bad self, that God may take it, and make it good; and so will be worshipping the everlasting and infinite Goodness, in spirit and

in truth.

SERMON VII. GOD'S INHERITANCE

GAL. iv. 6, 7.

Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

This is the second good news of Christmas-day.

The first is, that the Son of God became man.

The second is, why he became man. That men might become the sons of God through him.

Therefore St. Paul says, You are the sons of God. Not--you may be, if you are very good: but you are, in order that you may become very good. Your being good does not tell you that you are the sons of God: your baptism tells you so. Your baptism gives you a right to say, I am the child of God. How shall I behave then? What ought a child of God to be like? Now St. Paul, you see, knew well that we could not make ourselves God's children by any feelings, fancies, or experiences of our own. But he knew just as well that we cannot make ourselves behave as God's children should, by any thoughts and trying of our own.

God alone made us His children; God alone can make us behave like his children.

And therefore St. Paul says, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: by which we cry to God, Our Father.

But some will say, Have we that Spirit?

St. Paul says that you have: and surely he speaks truth.

Let us search, then, and see where that Spirit is in us. It is a great and awful honour for sinful men: but I do believe that if we seek, we shall find that He is not far from any one of us, for in Him we live and move, and have our being; and all in us which is not ignorance, falsehood, folly, and filth, comes from Him.

Now the Bible says that this Spirit is the Spirit of God's Son, the Spirit of Christ:- and what sort of Spirit is that?

We may see by remembering what sort of a Spirit Christ had when on earth; for He certainly has the same Spirit now--the Spirit which proceedeth everlastingly from the Father and from the Son.

And what was that Like? What was Christ Like? What was his Spirit Like? It was a Spirit of Love, mercy, pity, generosity, usefulness, unselfishness. A spirit of truth, honour, fearless love of what was right: a spirit of duty and willing obedience, which made Him

rejoice in doing His Father's will. In all things the spirit of a perfect SON, in all things a lovely, noble, holy spirit.

And now, my dear friends, is there nothing in you like that? You may forget it at times, you may disobey it very often: but is there not something in all your hearts more or less, which makes you love and admire what is right?

When you hear of a noble action, is there nothing in you which makes you approve and admire it? Is there nothing in your hearts which makes you pity those who are in sorrow and long to help them? Nothing which stirs your heart up when you hear of a man's nobly doing his duty, and dying rather than desert his post, or do a wrong or mean thing? Surely there is--surely there is.

Then, O my dear friends, when those feelings come into your hearts, rejoice with trembling, as men to whom God has given a great and precious gift. For they are none other than the Spirit of the Son of God, striving with your hearts that He may form Christ in you, and raise up your hearts to cry with full faith to God, 'My Father which art in heaven!'

'Ah but,' you will say, 'we like what is right, but we do not always do it. We like to see pity and mercy: but we are very often proud and selfish and tyrannical. We like to see justice and honour: but we are too apt to be mean and unjust ourselves. We like to see other people doing their duty: but we very often do not do ours.'

Well, my dear friends, perhaps that is true. If it be, confess your sins like honest men, and they shall be forgiven you. If you can so complain of yourselves, I am sure I can of myself, ten times more.

But do you not see that this very thing is a sign to you that the good and noble thoughts in you are not your own but God's? If they came out of your own spirits, then you would have no difficulty in obeying them. But they came out of God's Spirit; and our sinful and self-willed spirits are striving against his, and trying to turn away from God's light. What can we do then? We can cherish those noble thoughts, those pure and higher feelings, when they arise. We can welcome them as heavenly medicine from our heavenly Father. We can resolve not to turn away from them, even though they make us ashamed. Not to grieve the Spirit of the Son of God, even though he grieves us (as he ought to do and will do more and more), by showing us our own weakness and meanness, and how unlike we are to Christ, the only begotten Son.

If we shut our hearts to those good feelings, they will go away and leave us. And if they do, we shall neither respect our neighbours, nor respect ourselves. We shall see no good in our neighbours, but become scornful and suspicious to them; and if we do that, we shall soon see no good in ourselves. We shall become discontented with ourselves, more and more given up to angry thoughts and mean ways, which we hate and despise, all the while that we go on in them.

And then--mark my words--we shall lose all real feeling of God being our Father, and we his sons. We shall begin to fancy ourselves his slaves, and not his children; and God our taskmaster, and not our Father. We shall dislike the thought of God. We shall long to hide from God. We shall fall back into slavish terror, and a fearful

looking forward to of judgment and fiery indignation, because we have trampled under foot the grace of God, the noble, pure, tender, and truly graceful feelings which God's Spirit bestowed on us, to fill us with the grace of Christ.

Therefore, my dear friends, never check any good or right feelings in yourselves, or in your children; for they come from the spirit of the Son of God himself. But, as St. Paul says, Phil. iv. 3, 'Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, what soever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things', . . . 'and the God of peace shall be with you.' Avoid all which can make you mean, low, selfish, cruel. Cling to all which can fill your mind with lofty, kindly, generous, loyal thoughts; and so, in God's good time, you will enter into the meaning of those great words--Abba, Father. The more you give up your hearts to such good feelings, the more you will understand of God; the more nobleness there is in you, the more you will see God's nobleness, God's justice, God's love, God's true glory. The more you become like God's Son, the more you will understand how God can stoop to call himself your Father; and the more you will understand what a Father, what a perfect Father God is. And in the world to come, I trust, you will enter into the glorious liberty of the sons of God--that liberty which comes, as I told you last Sunday, not from doing your own will, but the will of God; that glory which comes, not from having anything of your own to pride yourselves upon, but from being filled with the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, by which you shall for ever look up freely, and yet reverently, to the Almighty God of heaven and earth, and say, 'Impossible as the honour seems for man, yet thou, O God, hast said it, and it is true. Thou, even thou art my Father, and I thy son in Jesus Christ, who became awhile the Son of man on earth, that I might become for ever the son of God in heaven.'

And so will come true to us St. Paul's great words: --If we be sons, then heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ.

Heirs of God: but what is our inheritance? The same as Christ's.

And what is Christ's inheritance? What but God himself?--The knowledge of our Father in heaven, of his love to us, and of his eternal beauty and glory, which fills all heavens and all worlds with light and life.

SERMON VIII. 'DE PROFUNDIS'

PSALM cxxx. 1.

Out of the deep have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice.

What is this deep of which David speaks so often? He knew it well, for he had been in it often and long. He was just the sort of man to be in it often. A man with great good in him, and great evil; with very strong passions and feelings, dragging him down into the deep, and great light and understanding to show him the dark secrets of

that horrible pit when he was in it; and with great love of God too, and of order, and justice, and of all good and beautiful things, to make him feel the horribleness of that pit where he ought not to be, all the more from its difference, its contrast, with the beautiful world of light, and order, and righteousness where he ought to be. Therefore he knew that deep well, and abhorred it, and he heaps together every ugly name, to try and express what no man can express, the horror of that place. It is a horrible pit, mire and clay, where he can find no footing, but sinks all the deeper for his struggling. It is a place of darkness and of storms, a shoreless and bottomless sea, where he is drowning, and drowning, while all God's waves and billows go over him. It is a place of utter loneliness, where he sits like a sparrow on the housetop, or a doleful bird in the desert, while God has put his lovers and friends away from him, and hid his acquaintance out of his sight, and no man cares for his soul, and all men seem to him liars, and God himself seems to have forgotten him and forgotten all the world. It is a dreadful net which has entangled his feet, a dark prison in which he is set so fast that he cannot get forth. It is a torturing disgusting disease, which gives his flesh no health, and his bones no rest, and his wounds are putrid and corrupt. It is a battle-field after the fight, where he seems to lie stript among the dead, like those who are wounded and cut away from God's hand, and lies groaning in the dust of death, seeing nothing round him but doleful shapes of destruction and misery, alone in the outer darkness, while a horrible dread overwhelms him. Yea, it is hell itself, the pit of hell, the nethermost hell, he says, where God's wrath burns like fire, till his tongue cleaves to his gums, and his bones are burnt up like a firebrand, till he is weary of crying; his throat is dry, his heart fails him for waiting so long upon his God.

Yes. A dark and strange place is that same deep pit of God--if, indeed, it be God's and God made it. Perhaps God did not make it. For God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good: and that pit cannot be very good; for all good things are orderly, and in shape; and in that pit is no shape, no order, nothing but contradiction and confusion. When a man is in that pit, it will seem to him as if he were alone in the world, and longing above all things for company; and yet he will hate to have any one to speak to him, and wrap himself up in himself to brood over his own misery. When he is in that pit he shall be so blind that he can see nothing, though his eyes be open in broad noon-day. When he is in that pit he will hate the thing which he loves most, and love the thing which he hates most. When he is in that pit he will long to die, and yet cling to life desperately, and be horribly afraid of dying. When he is in that pit it will seem to him that God is awfully, horribly near him, and he will try to hide from God, try to escape from under God's hand: and yet all the while that God seems so dreadfully near him, God will seem further off from him than ever, millions and millions of miles away, parted from him by walls of iron, and a great gulf which he can never pass. There is nothing but contradiction in that pit: the man who is in it is of two minds about himself, and his kin and neighbours, and all heaven and earth; and knows not where to turn, or what to think, or even where he is at all.

For the food which he gets in that deep pit is very hunger of soul, and rage, and vain desires. And the ground which he stands on in that deep is a bottomless quagmire, and doubt, and change, and shapeless dread. And the air which he breathes in that deep is the

very fire of God, which burns up everlastingly all the chalk and dross of the world.

I said that that deep was not merely the deep of affliction. No: for you may see men with every comfort which wealth and home can give, who are tormented day and night in that deep pit in the midst of all their prosperity, calling for a drop of water to cool their tongue, and finding none. And you may see poor creatures dying in agony on lonely sick beds, who are not in that pit at all, but in that better place whereof it is written, 'Blessed are they who, going through the vale of misery, use it for a well, and the pools are filled with water;' and again, 'If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink;' and 'the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up to everlasting life.'

No--that deep pit is a far worse place; an utterly bad place; and yet it may be good for a man to have fallen into it; and, strangely enough, if he do fall in, the lower he sinks in it, the better for him at last. That is another strange contradiction in that pit, which David found, that though it was a bottomless pit, the deeper he sank in it, the more likely he was to find his feet set on a rock; the further down in the nethermost hell he was, the nearer he was to being delivered from the nethermost hell.

Of course, if he had staid in that pit, he must have died, body and soul. No mortal man, or immortal soul could endure it long. No immortal soul could; for he would lose all hope, all faith in God, all feeling of there being anything like justice and order in the world, all hope for himself, or for mankind, lying so in that living grave where no man can see God's righteousness, or his faithfulness in that land where all things are forgotten.

And his mere mortal body could not stand it. The misery and terror and confusion of his soul would soon wear out his body, and he would die, as I have seen men actually die, when their souls have been left in that deep somewhat too long; shrink together into dark melancholy, and pine away, and die. And I have seen sweet young creatures too, whom God for some purpose of his own (which must be good and loving, for HE did it) has let fall awhile into that deep of darkness; and then in compassion to their youth, and tenderness, and innocence, has lifted them gently out again, and set their weary feet upon the everlasting Rock, which is Christ; and has filled them with the light of his countenance, and joy and peace in believing; and has led them by green pastures and made them rest by the waters of comfort; and yet, though their souls were healed, their bodies were not. That fearful struggle has been too much for frail humanity, and they have drooped, and faded, and gone peacefully after a while home to their God, as a fair flower withers if the fire has but once past over it.

But some I have seen, men and women, who have arisen, like David, out of that strange deep, all the stronger for their fall; and have found out another strange contradiction about that deep, and the fire of God which burns below in it. For that fire hardens a man and softens him at the same time; and he comes out of it hardened to that hardness of which it is written, 'Do thou endure hardness like a good soldier of Jesus Christ;' and again, 'I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith, I have finished my course:' yet softened to that softness of which it is written, 'Be ye tenderhearted, compassionate, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven

you;--and again, 'We have a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, seeing that he has been tempted in all things like as we are, yet without sin.'

Happy, thrice happy are they who have thus walked through the valley of the shadow of death, and found it the path which leads to everlasting life. Happy are they who have thus writhed awhile in the fierce fire of God, and have had burnt out of them the chaff and dross, and all which offends, and makes them vain, light, and yet makes them dull, drags them down at the same time; till only the pure gold of God's righteousness is left, seven times tried in the fire, incorruptible, and precious in the sight of God and man. Such people need not regret--they will not regret--all that they have gone through. It has made them brave, made them sober, made them patient. It has given them

The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill;

and so has shaped them into the likeness of Christ, who was made perfect by suffering; and though he were a Son, yet in the days of his flesh, made strong supplication and crying with tears to his Father, and was heard in that he feared; and so, though he died on the cross and descended into hell, yet triumphed over death and hell, by dying and by descending; and conquered them by submitting to them. And yet they have been softened in that fierce furnace of God's wrath, into another likeness of Christ--which after all is still the same; the character which he showed when he wept by the grave of Lazarus, and over the sinful city of Jerusalem; which he showed when his heart yearned over the perishing multitude, and over the leper, and the palsied man, and the maniac possessed with devils; the character which he showed when he said to the woman taken in adultery, 'Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more;' which he showed when he said to the sinful Magdalene, who washed his feet with tears, and wiped them with her hair, 'her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much;' the likeness which he showed in his very death agony upon the torturing cross, when he prayed for his murderers, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' This is the character which man may get in that dark deep.--To feel for all, and feel with all; to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep; to understand people's trials, and make allowances for their temptations; to put oneself in their place, till we see with their eyes, and feel with their hearts, till we judge no man, and have hope for all; to be fair, and patient, and tender with every one we meet; to despise no one, despair of no one, because Christ despises none, and despairs of none; to look upon every one we meet with love, almost with pity, as people who either have been down into the deep of horror, or may go down into it any day; to see our own sins in other people's sins, and know that we might do what they do, and feel as they feel, any moment, did God desert us; to give and forgive, to live and let live, even as Christ gives to us, and forgives us, and lives for us, and lets us live, in spite of all our sins.

And how shall we learn this? How shall the bottomless pit, if we fall into it, be but a pathway to the everlasting rock?

David tells us:

'Out of the deep have I cried unto thee, O Lord.'

He cried to God.

Not to himself, his own learning, talents, wealth, prudence, to pull him out of that pit. Not to princes, nobles, and great men. Not to doctrines, books, church-goings. Not to the dearest friend he had on earth; for they had forsaken him, could not understand him, thought him perhaps beside himself. Not to his own good works, almsgivings, church-goings, church-buildings. Not to his own experiences, faith's assurances, frames or feelings. The matter was too terrible to be plastered over in that way, or in any way. He was face to face with God alone, in utter weakness, in utter nakedness of soul, He cried to God himself. There was the lesson.

God took away from him all things, that he might have no one to cry to but God.

God took him up, and cast him down: and there he sat all alone, astonished and confounded, like Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, when she sat alone upon the parching rock. Like Rizpah, he watched the dead corpses of all his hopes and plans, all for which he had lived, and which made life worth having, withering away there by his side. But it was told David what Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, had done. And it is told to one greater than David, even to Jesus Christ, the Son of David, what the poor soul does when it sits alone in its despair. Or rather it need not be told him; for he sees all, weeps over all, will comfort all: and it shall be to that poor soul as it was to poor deserted Hagar in the sandy desert, when the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast her child--the only thing she had left--under one of the shrubs and hurried away; for she said, 'Let me not see the child die.' And the angel of the Lord called to her out of heaven, saying, 'The Lord hath heard the voice of the lad where he is;' and God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water.

It shall be with that poor soul as it was with Moses, when he went up alone into the mount of God, and fasted forty days and forty nights amid the earthquake and the thunderstorm, and the rocks which melted before the Lord. And behold, when it was past, he talked face to face with God, as a man talketh with his friend, and his countenance shone with heavenly light, when he came down triumphant out of the mount of God.

So shall it be with every soul of man who, being in the deep, cries out of that deep to God, whether in bloody India or in peaceful England. For He with whom we have to do is not a tyrant, but a Father; not a taskmaster, but a Giver and a Redeemer. We may ask him freely, as David does, to consider our complaint, because he will consider it well, and understand it, and do it justice. He is not extreme to mark what is done amiss, and therefore we can abide his judgments. There is mercy with him, and therefore it is worth while to fear him. He waits for us year after year, with patience which cannot tire; therefore it is but fair that we should wait a while for him. With him is plenteous redemption, and therefore redemption enough for us, and for those likewise whom we love. He will redeem us from all our sins: and what do we need more? He will make us perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect. Let him then, if

he must, make us perfect by sufferings. By sufferings Christ was made perfect; and what was the best path for Jesus Christ is surely good enough for us, even though it be a rough and a thorny one. Let us lie still beneath God's hand; for though his hand be heavy upon us, it is strong and safe beneath us too; and none can pluck us out of his hand, for in him we live and move and have our being; and though we go down into hell with David, with David we shall find God there, and find, with David, that he will not leave our souls in hell, or suffer his holy ones to see corruption. Yes; have faith in God. Nothing in thee which he has made shall see corruption; for it is a thought of God's, and no thought of his can perish. Nothing shall be purged out of thee but thy disease; nothing shall be burnt out of thee but thy dross; and that in thee shall be saved, and live to all eternity, of which God said at the beginning, Let us make man in our own image. Yes. Have faith in God; and say to him once for all, 'Though thou slay me, yet will I love thee; for thou lovedst me in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world.'

SERMON IX. THE LOVE OF GOD ITS OWN REWARD

DEUT. xxx. 19, 20.

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life that both thou and thy seed may live; that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest cleave unto him, for he is thy life and the length of thy days, that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord God sware unto thy fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give them.

I spoke to you last Sunday on this text. But there is something more in it, which I had not time to speak of then.

Moses here tells the Israelites what will happen to them if they keep God's law.

They will love God. That was to be their reward. They were to have other rewards beside. Beside loving God, it would be well with them and their children, and they would live long in the land which God had given them. But their first reward, their great reward, would be that they would love God.

If they obeyed God, they would have reason to love him.

Now we commonly put this differently.

We say, If you love God, you will obey him; which is quite true. But what Moses says is truer still, and deeper still. Moses says, If you obey God, you will love him.

Again we say, If you love God, God will reward you; which is true; though not always true in this life. But Moses says a truer and deeper thing. Moses says that loving God is our reward; that the greatest reward, the greatest blessing which a man can have, is this—that the man should love God. Now does this seem strange? It is

not strange, nevertheless.

For there are two sorts of faith; and one must always, I sometimes think, come before the other.

The first is implicit faith--blind faith--the sort of faith a child has in what its parents tell it. A child, we know, believes its parents blindly, even though it does not understand what they tell it. It takes for granted that they are right.

The second is experimental faith--the faith which comes from experience and reason, when a man looks back upon his life, and on God's dealings with him; and then sees from experience what reason he has for trusting and loving God, who has helped him onward through so many chances and changes for so many years.

Now some people cry out against blind implicit faith, as if it was childish and unreasonable. But I cannot. I think every one learns to love his neighbour, very much as Moses told the Jews they would learn to love God; namely, by trusting them somewhat blindly at first.

Is it not so? Is it not so always with young people, when they begin to be fond of each other? They trust each other, they do not know why, or how. Before they are married, they have little or no experience of each other; of each other's tempers and characters: and yet they trust each other, and say in their hearts, 'He can never be false to me;' and are ready to put their honour and fortunes into each other's hands, to live together for better for worse, till death them part. It is a blind faith in each other, that, and those who will may laugh at it, and call it the folly and rashness of youth. I do not believe that God laughs at it: that God calls it folly and rashness. It surely comes from God.

For there is something in each of them worth trusting, worth loving. True, they may be disappointed in each other; but they need not be. If they are true to themselves; if they will listen to the better voice within, and be true to their own better feelings, all will be well, and they will find after marriage that they did not do a rash and a foolish thing, when they gave up themselves to each other, and cast in their lot together blindly to live and die.

And then, after that first blind faith and love in each other which they had before marriage, will come, as the years roll by, a deeper, sounder faith and love from experience.--An experience of which I shall not talk here; for those who have not felt it for themselves would not know what I mean; and those who have felt it need no clumsy words of mine to describe it to them.

Now, my dear friends, this is one of the things by which marriage is consecrated to an excellent mystery, as the Prayer-book says. This is one of the things in which marriage is a pattern and picture of the spiritual union which is between Christ and his Church.

First, as I said, comes blind faith. A young person, setting out in life, has little experience of God's love; he has little to make him sure that the way of life, and honour, and peace, is to obey God's laws. But he is told so. His Bible tells him so. Wiser and older people than he tell him so, and God himself tells him so. God

himself makes up in the young person's heart a desire after goodness.

Then he takes it for granted blindly. He says to himself, I can but try. They tell me to taste and see whether the Lord is gracious. I will taste. They tell me that the way of his commandments is the way to make life worth loving, and to see good days. I will try. And so the years go by. The young person has grown middle-aged, old. He or she has been through many trials, many disappointments; perhaps more than one bitter loss. But if they have held fast by God; if they have tried, however clumsily, to keep God's law, and walk in God's way, then there will have grown up in them a trust in God, and a love for God, deeper and broader far than any which they had in youth; a love grounded on experience. They can point back to so many blessings which the Lord gave them unexpectedly; to so many sorrows which the Lord gave them strength to bear, though they seemed at first sight past bearing; to so many disappointments which seemed ill luck at the time, and yet which turned out good for them in the end. And so comes a deep, reasonable love to their Heavenly Father. Now they have TASTED that the Lord is gracious. Now they can say, with the Samaritans, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying, but because we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.' And when sadness and affliction come on them, as it must come, they can look back, and so get strength to look forward. They can say with David, 'I will go on in the strength of the Lord God. I will make mention only of his righteousness. Oh my God, thou hast taught me from my youth up until now; hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also, when I am old and grey-headed, oh Lord, forsake me not, till I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to those whom I leave behind me.'

And so, by remembering what God HAS been to them, they can face what is coming. 'They will not be afraid of evil tidings,' as David says; 'for their heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.'

And when old age comes, and brings weakness and sickness, and low spirits, still they have comfort. They can say with David again, 'I have been young, and now am old, but never saw I the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread.'

Oh my dear friends, young people especially--there are many things which you may long for which you cannot have: much happiness which is NOT within your reach. But THIS you can have, if you will but long for it: this happiness IS within your reach, if you will but put out your hand and take it.--The everlasting unfailing comfort of loving God, and of knowing that God loves you. Oh choose that now at once. Choose God's ways which are pleasantness, and God's paths which are peace; and then in your old age, whether you become rich or poor, whether you are left alone, or go down to your grave in peace with children and grandchildren to close your eyes, you will still have the one great reward, the true reward, the everlasting reward which Moses promised the old Israelites. You will have reason to love God, who has carried you safe through life, and will carry you safe through death, and to say with all his saints and martyrs, 'Many things I know not; and many things I have lost: but this I know.--I know in whom I have believed; and this I cannot lose; even God himself, whose name is faithful and true.'

SERMON X. THE RACE OF LIFE

JOHN i. 26.

There standeth one among you whom ye know not.

This is a solemn text. It warns us, and yet it comforts us. It tells us that there is a person standing among us so great, that John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets, was not worthy to unloose his shoes' latchet.

Some of you know who he is. Some of you, perhaps, do not. If you know him, you will be glad to be reminded of him to-day. If you do not know him, I will tell you who he is.

Only bear this in mind, that whether you know him or not, he is standing among us. We have not driven him away, and cannot drive him away. Our not seeing him will not prevent his seeing us. He is always near us; ready, if we ask him, as the Collect bids us, to 'come among us, and with great might succour us.'

For, my friends, this is the meaning of the text, as far as it has to do with us. The noble Collect for to-day tells this, and explains to us what we are to think of the Epistle and the Gospel.

The Epistle tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ is at hand, and that therefore we are to fret about nothing, but make our requests known to him. The Gospel tells us that he stands among us. The Collect tells us what we are to do, because he is at hand, because he stands among us.

And what are we to do?

Recollect my friends, what John the Baptist said, according to St. Matthew, after the words in the text--'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.'

The Collect asks him to do that--the first half of it at least. To baptize us with the Holy Ghost, lest he should need to baptize us with fire.

For the Collect says, we have all a race to run. We have all a journey to make through life. We have all so to get through this world, that we shall inherit the world to come; so to pass through the things of time (as one of the Collects says) that we finally lose not the things eternal. God has given each of us our powers and character, marked out for each of us our path in life, set each of us our duty to do.

But how shall we make the proper use of our powers?

How shall we keep to our path in life?

How shall we do our duty faithfully?

In short, so as St. Paul puts it--How shall we run our race, so as

not to lose, but to win it?

For the Collect says--and we ought to have found it out for ourselves before now--Our sins and wickedness hinder us sorely in running the race which is set before us.

Our sins and wickedness. The Collect speaks of these as two different things; and I believe rightly, for the New Testament speaks of them as two different things. Sin, in the New Testament, means strictly what we call "failings," "defects" a missing the mark, a falling short; as it is written--All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, that is, of the likeness of a perfect man. {75}

Thus, stupidity, laziness, cowardice, bad temper, greediness after pleasure--these are strictly speaking what the New Testament calls sins. Wickedness--iniquity--seem to be harder words, and to mean worse offences. They mean the evil things which a man does, not out of the weakness of his mortal nature, but out of his own wicked will, and what the Bible calls the naughtiness of his heart. So wickedness means, not merely open crimes which are punishable by the law, but all which comes out of a man's own wilfulness and perverseness--injustice (which is the first meaning of iniquity), cunning, falsehood, covetousness, pride, self-conceit, tyranny, cruelty--these seem to be what the Scripture calls wickedness. Of course one cannot draw the line exactly, in any matters so puzzling as questions about our own souls must always be: but on the whole. I think you will find this rule not far wrong -

That all which comes from the weakness of a man's soul, is sin: all which comes from abusing its strength, is wickedness. All which drags a man down, and makes him more like a brute animal, is sin: all which puffs him up, and makes him more like a devil, is wickedness. It is as well to bear this in mind, because a man may have a great horror of sin, and be hard enough, and too hard upon poor sinners; and yet all the time he may be thoroughly, and to his heart's core, a wicked man. The Pharisees of old were so. So they are now. Take you care that you be not like to them. Keep clear of sin: but keep clear of wickedness likewise.

For, says the Collect, both will hinder you in your race: perhaps cause you to break down in it, and never reach the goal at all.

Sin will hinder you, by dragging you back.

Wickedness will hinder you, by putting you altogether out of the right road.

If a man be laden with sins; stupid, lazy, careless, over fond of pleasure;--much more, if he be given up to enjoying himself in bad ways, about which we all know too well--then he is like a man who starts in a race, weak, crippled, over-weighted, or not caring whether he wins or loses; and who therefore lags behind, or grows tired, or looks round, and wants to stop and amuse himself, instead of pushing on stoutly and bravely. And therefore St. Paul bids us lay aside every weight (that is every bad habit which makes us lazy and careless), and the sin which does so easily beset us, and run with patience our appointed race, looking to Jesus, the author of our faith--who stands by to give us faith, confidence, courage to go on--Jesus, who has compassion on those who are ignorant, and out of the

way by no wilfulness of their own; who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; who can help us, can deliver us, and who will do what he can, and do all he can.

He can and will strengthen us, freshen us, encourage us, inspirit us, by giving us his Holy Spirit, that we may have spirit and power to run our race, day by day, and tide by tide. And so, if he sees us weak and fainting over our work, he will baptize us with the Holy Ghost.

And yet there are times when he will baptize a sinner not only with the Holy Ghost, but with fire--I am still speaking, mind, of a sinner, not of a wicked man.

And when? When he sees the man sitting down by the roadside to play, with no intention of moving on. I do not say--if he sees the man sitting down to play at all. God forbid! How can a man run his life-long race--how can he even keep up for a week, a day, at doing his best at the full stretch of his power, without stopping to take breath? I cannot, God knows. If any man can--be it so. Some are stronger than others: but be sure of this; that God counts it no sin in a man to stop and take breath. 'Press forward toward the mark of your high calling,' St. Paul says: but he does not forbid a man to refresh and amuse himself harmlessly and rationally, from time to time, with all the pleasant things which God has put into this world. They do refresh us, and they do amuse us, these pleasant things. And God made them, and put them here. Surely he put them here to refresh and amuse us. He did not surely put them here to trap us, and snare us, and tempt us not to run the very race which he himself has set before us? No, no, my friends. He made pleasant things to please us, amusing things to amuse us. Every good gift comes from him.

But if a man thinks of nothing but amusing himself, he is like a horse who stands still in the middle of a journey, and begins feeding. Let him do his day's journey, and feed afterwards; and so get strength for his next day's work. But if he will stand still, and feed; if he will forget that he has any work at all to do; then we shall punish him, to make him go on. And so will God do with us. He will strike us then; and sharply too. Much more, if a man gives himself up to sinful pleasure; if he gives himself up to a loose and profligate life, and, like many a young man, wastes his substance in riotous living, and devours his heavenly Father's gifts with harlots--then God will strike that man; and all the more sharply the more worth and power there is in the man. The more God has given the man, the sharper will be God's stroke, if he deserves it.

And why?

Ask yourselves. Suppose that your horse had plunged into a deep ditch, and was lying there in mire and thorns; would you not strike him, and sharply too, to make him put out his whole strength, and rise, and by one great struggle clear himself?

Of course you would: and the more spirited, the more powerful the animal was, the sharper you would be with him, because the more sure you would be that he could answer to your call if he chose.

Even so does God with us. If he sees us lying down; forgetting utterly that we have any work or duty to do; and wallowing in the

mire of fleshly lusts, and thorns of worldly cares, then he will strike; and all the more sharply, the more real worth or power there is in us; that he may rouse us, and force us to exert ourselves and by one great struggle, like the mired horse, clear ourselves out of the sin which besets us, and holds us down, and leap, as it were, once and for all, out of the death of sin, into the life of righteousness.

But much more if there be not merely sin in us, but wickedness; self-will, self-conceit, and rebellion.

For see, my friends. If we were training a young animal, how should we treat it? If it were merely weak, we should strengthen and exercise it. If it were merely ignorant, we should teach it. If it were lazy, we should begin to punish it; but gently, that it might still have confidence, faith in us, and pleasure in its work.

But if we found wickedness in it--vice, as we rightly call it--if it became restive, that is, rebellious and self-willed, then we should punish it indeed. Seldom, perhaps, but very sharply; that it might see clearly that we were the stronger, and that rebellion was of no use at all.

And so does the Lord with us, my friends. If we will not go his way by kindness, he will make us go by severity.

First, when we are christened, and after that day by day, if we ask him--and often when we ask him not--he gives us the gentle baptism of his Holy Spirit, freshening, strengthening, encouraging, inspiriting. But if we will not go on well for that; if we will rebel, and try our own way, and rush out of God's road after this and that, in pride and self-will, as if we were our own masters; then, my friends--then will God baptize us with fire, and strike with a blow which goes nigh to cut a man in two. Very seldom he strikes; for he is pitiful, and of tender mercy: but with a rod as of fire, of which it is written, that it is sharper than a two-edged sword, and pierces through the joints and marrow. Very seldom: but very sharply, that there may be no mistake about what the blow means, and that the man may know, however cunning, or proud, or self-righteous he may be, that God is the Lord, God is his Master, and will be obeyed; and woe to him, if he obey him not. And what can a man do then, but writhe in the bitterness of his soul, and get back into God's highway as fast as he can, in fear and trembling lest the next blow cut him in asunder? And so, by the bitterness of disappointment, or bereavement, or sickness, or poverty, or worst of all, of shame, will the Lord baptize the man with fire.

But all in love, my friends; and all for the man's good. Does God LIKE to punish his creatures? LIKE to torment them? Some think that he does, and say that he finds what they call 'satisfaction' in punishing. I think that they mistake the devil for God. No, my friends; what does he say himself? 'Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked; and not rather that he should turn from his ways, and live?' Surely he has not. If he had, do you think that he would have sent us into this world at all? I do not. And I trust and hope that you will not. Believe that even when he cuts us to the heart's core, and baptizes us with fire, he does it only out of his eternal love, that he may help and deliver us all the more speedily.

For God's sake--for Christ's sake--for your own sake--keep that in mind, that Christ's will, and therefore God's will, is to help and deliver us; that he stands by us, and comes among us, for that very purpose. Consider St. Paul's parable, in which he talks of us as men running a race, and of Christ as the judge who looks on to see how we run. But for what purpose does Christ look on? To catch us out, as we say? To mark down every fault of ours, and punish wherever he has an opportunity or a reason? Does he stand there spying, frowning, fault-finding, accusing every man in his turn, extreme to watch what is done amiss? If an earthly judge did that, we should call him--what he would be--an ill-conditioned man. But dare we fancy anything ill-conditioned in God? God forbid! His conditions are altogether good, and his will a good will to men; and therefore, say the Epistle and the Collect, we ought not to be terrified, but to rejoice, at the thought that the Lord is looking on. However badly we are running our race, yet if we are trying to move forward at all, we ought to rejoice that God in Christ is looking on.

And why?

Why? Because he is looking on, not to torment, but to help. Because he loves us better than we love ourselves. Because he is more anxious for us to get safely through this world than we are ourselves.

Will you understand that, and believe that, once for all, my friends?--That God is not AGAINST you, but FOR you, in the struggles of life; that he WANTS you to get through safe; WANTS you to succeed; WANTS you to win; and that therefore he will help you, and hear your cry.

And therefore when you find yourselves wrong, utterly wrong, do not cry to this man or that man, 'Do YOU help me; do you set me a little more right, before God comes and finds me in the wrong, and punishes me.' Cry to God himself, to Christ himself; ask HIM to lift you up, ask him to set you right. Do not be like St. Peter before his conversion, and cry, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord; wait a little, till I have risen up, and washed off my stains, and made myself somewhat fit to be seen.'--No. Cry, 'Come quickly, O Lord--at once, just because I am a sinful man; just because I am sore let and hindered in running my race by my own sins and wickedness; because I am lazy and stupid; because I am perverse and vicious, THEREFORE raise up thy power, and come to me, thy miserable creature, thy lost child, and with thy great might succour me. Lift me up for I have fallen very low; deliver me, for I have plunged out of thy sound and safe highway into deep mire, where no ground is. Help myself I cannot, and if thou help me not, I am undone.'

Do so. Pray so. Let your sins and wickedness be to you not a reason for hiding from Christ who stands by; but a reason, the reason of all reasons, for crying to Christ who stands by.

And then, whether he deliver you by kind means or by sharp ones, deliver you he will; and set your feet on firm ground, and order your goings, that you may run with patience the race which is set before you along the road of life, and the pathway of God's commandments, wherein there is no death.

This, my friends, is one of the meanings of Advent. This is the

meaning of the Collect, the Epistle, and the Gospel.--That God in Christ stands by us, ready to help and deliver us; and that if we cry to him even out of the lowest depth, he will hear our voice. And that then, when he has once put us into the right road again, and sees us going bravely along it to the best of the power which he has given us, he will fulfil to us his eternal promise, 'Thy sins--and not only thy sins, but thine iniquities--I will remember no more.'

SERMON XI. SELF-RESPECT AND SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

PSALM vii. 8.

Give sentence for me, O Lord, according to my righteousness; and according to the innocency that is in me.

Is this speech self-righteous? If so, it is a bad speech; for self-righteousness is a bad temper of mind; there are few worse. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar.

This is plain enough; and true as God is true. But there is another temper of mind which is right in its way; and which is not self-righteousness, though it may look like it at first sight. I mean the temper of Job, when his friends were trying to prove to him that he must be a bad man, and to make him accuse himself of all sorts of sins which he had not committed; and he answered that he would utter no deceit, and tell no lies about himself. 'Till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me; my righteousness I will hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live.' I have, on the whole, tried to be a good man, and I will not make myself out a bad one.

For, my friends, with the Bible as with everything else, we must hear both sides of the question, lest we understand neither side.

We may misuse St. John's doctrine, that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. We may deceive ourselves in the very opposite way.

In the first place, some people, having learnt that it is right to confess their sins, try to have as many sins as possible to confess. I do not mean that they commit the sins, but that they try to fancy they have committed them. This is very common now, and has been for many hundred years, especially among young women and lads who are of a weakly melancholy temper, or who have suffered some great disappointment. They are fond of accusing themselves; of making little faults into great ones; of racking their memories to find themselves out in the wrong; of taking the darkest possible view of themselves, and of what is going to happen to them. They forget that Solomon, the wise, when he says, 'Be not over-much wicked; neither be thou foolish--why shouldst thou die before thy time?'--says also, 'Be not righteous over-much; neither make thyself over-wise. Why shouldst thou destroy thyself?'

For such people do destroy themselves. I have seen them kill their own bodies, and die early, by this folly. And I have seen them kill their own souls, too, and enter into strong delusions, till they believe a lie, and many lies, from which one had hoped that the Bible would have delivered any and every man.

One cannot be angry with such people. One can only pity them, and pity them all the more, when one finds them generally the most innocent, the very persons who have least to confess. One can but pity them, when one sees them applying to themselves God's warnings against sins of which they never even heard the names, and fancying that God speaks to them, as St. Paul says that he did to the old heathen Romans, when they were steeped up to the lips in every crime.

No--one can do more than pity them. One can pray for them that they may learn to know God, and who he is: and by knowing him, may be delivered out of the hands of cunning and cruel teachers, who make a market of their melancholy, and hide from them the truth about God, lest the truth should make them free, while their teachers wish to keep them slaves.

This is one misuse of St. John's doctrine. There is another and a far worse misuse of it.

A man may be proud of confessing his sins; may become self-righteous and conceited, according to the number of the sins which he confesses.

So deceitful is this same human heart of ours, that so it is I have seen people quite proud of calling themselves miserable sinners. I say, proud of it. For if they had really felt themselves miserable sinners, they would have said less about their own feelings. If a man really feels what sin is--if he feels what a miserable, pitiful, mean thing it is to be doing wrong when one knows better, to be the slave of one's own tempers, passions, appetites--oh, if man or woman ever knew the exceeding sinfulness of sin, he would hide his own shame in the depths of his heart, and tell it to God alone, or at most to none on earth save the holiest, the wisest, the truest, the nearest and the dearest.

But when one hears a man always talking about his own sinfulness, one suspects--and from experience one has only too much reason to suspect--that he is simply saying in a civil way, 'I am a better man than you; for I talk about my sinfulness, and you do not.'

For if you answer such a man, as old Job or David would have done, 'I will not confess what I have not felt. I have tried and am trying to be an upright, respectable, sober, right-living man. Let God judge me according to the innocency that is in me. I know that I am not perfect: no man is that: but I will not cant; I will not be a hypocrite; and if I accuse myself of sins which I have not committed, it seems to me that I shall be mocking God, and deceiving myself. I will trust to God to judge me fairly, to balance between the good and the evil which is in me, and deal with me accordingly.'

If you speak in that way, the other man will answer you plainly enough, 'Ah! you are utterly benighted. You are building on legality and morality. You have not yet learnt the first principles of the

Gospel.' And with these, and other words, will give you to understand this--That he thinks he is going to heaven, and you are going to hell.

Now, my dear friends, you are partly right, and he is partly right. St. Paul will show you where you are right and where he is right. He does so, I think, in a certain noble text of his in which he says, 'I judge not mine own self; for I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.'

Now remember that no man was less self-righteous than St. Paul. No man ever saw more clearly the sinfulness of sin. No man ever put into words so strongly the struggle between good and evil which goes on in the human heart. In one place, even, when speaking of his former life, he calls himself the chief of sinners. Yet St. Paul, when he had done his duty, knew that he had done it, and was not afraid to say--as no honest and upright man need be afraid to say--'I know nothing against myself.' For if you have done right, my friend, it is God who has helped you to do it; and it is difficult to see how you can honour God, by pretending instead that he has left you to do wrong.

This, then, seems to be the rule. If you have done wrong, be not afraid to confess it. If you have done right, be not afraid to confess that either. And meanwhile keep up your self-respect. Try to do your duty. Try to keep your honour bright. Let no man be able to say that he is the worse for you. Still more let no woman be able to say that she is the worse for you; for if you treat another man's daughter as you would not let him treat yours, where is your honour then, or your clear conscience? What cares man, what cares God, for your professions of uprightness and respectability, if you take good care to behave well to men, who can defend themselves, and take no care to behave well to a poor girl, who cannot defend herself? Recollect that when Job stood up for his own integrity, and would not give up his belief that he was a righteous man, he took care to justify himself in this matter, as well as on others. 'I made a covenant with mine eyes,' he says; 'why then should I think upon a maid? If mine heart have been deceived by a woman; or if I have laid wait at my neighbour's door;' 'Then,' he says in words too strong for me to repeat, 'let others do to my wife as I have done to theirs.'

Avoid this sin, and all sins. Let no man be able to say that you have defrauded him, that you have tyrannized over him; that you have neglected to do your duty by him. Let no man be able to say that you have rewarded him evil for evil. If possible, let him not be able to say that you have even lost your temper with him. Be generous; be forgiving. If you have an opportunity, be like David, and help him who without a cause is your enemy; and then you will have a right to say, like David, 'Give sentence with me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to the cleanness of my hands in thy sight.'

True--that will not justify you. In God's sight shall no man living be justified, if justification is to come by having no faults. What man is there who lives, and sins not? Who is there among us, but knows that he is not the man he might be? Who does not know, that even if he seldom does what he ought not, he too often leaves undone what he ought? And more than that--none of us but does many a really

wrong thing of which he never knows, at least in this life. None of us but are blind, more or less, to our own faults; and often blind-- God forgive us!--to our very worst faults.

Then let us remember, that he who judges us IS THE LORD.

Now is that a thought to be afraid of?

David did not think so, when he had done right. For he says, in this Psalm, 'Judge me, O Lord!'

And when he has done wrong, he thinks so still less; for then he asks God all the more earnestly, not only to judge him, but to correct him likewise. 'Purge me,' he says, 'and I shall be clean. Cleanse thou me from my secret faults, and make me to understand wisdom secretly. For thou requirest truth in the inward parts.'

That is bravely spoken, and worthy of an honest man, who wishes above all things to be right, whatsoever it may cost him.

But how did David get courage to ask that?

By knowing God, and who God was.

For this, my friends, is the key to the whole matter--as it is to all matters--Who is God?

If you believe God to be a hard task-master, and a cruel being, extreme to mark what is done amiss, an accuser like the devil, instead of a forgiver and a Saviour, as he really is;--then you will begin judging yourself wrongly and clumsily, instead of asking God to judge you wisely and well.

You will break both of the golden rules which St. Anthony, the famous hermit, used to give to his scholars.--'Regret not that which is past; and trust not in thine own righteousness.' For you will lose time, and lose heart, in fretting over old sins and follies, instead of confessing them once and for all to God, and going boldly to his throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help you in the time of need; that you may try again and do better for the future. And so it will be true of you--I am sure I have seen it come true of many a poor soul--what David found, before he found out the goodness of God's free pardon:- 'While I held my tongue, my bones waxed old through my daily complaining. For thy hand was heavy upon me night and day; my moisture was like the drought in summer.'

And all that while (such contradictory creatures are we all), you may be breaking St. Anthony's other golden rule, and trusting in your own righteousness.

You will begin trying to cleanse yourself from little outside faults, and fancying that that is all you have to do, instead of asking God to cleanse you from your secret faults, from the deep inward faults which he alone can see; forgetting that they are the root, and the outside faults only the fruit. And so you will be like a foolish sick man, who is afraid of the doctor, and therefore tries to physic himself. But what does he do? Only tamper and peddle with the outside symptoms of his complaint, instead of going to the physician, that he may find out and cure the complaint itself. Many a man has

killed his own body in that way; and many a man more, I fear, has killed his own soul, because he was afraid of going to the Great Physician.

But if you will believe that God is good, and not evil; if you will believe that the heavenly Father is indeed YOUR Father; if you will believe that the Lord Jesus Christ really loves you, really died to save you, really wishes to deliver you from your sins, and make you what you ought to be, and what you can be: then you will have heart to do your duty; because you will be sure that God helps you to do your duty. You will have heart to fight bravely against your bad habits, instead of fretting cowardly over them; because you know that God is fighting against them for you. You will not, on the other hand, trust in your own righteousness; because you will soon learn that you have no righteousness of your own: but that all the good in you comes from God, who works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.

And when you examine yourself, and think over your own life and character, as every man ought to do, especially in Advent and Lent, you will have heart to say, 'O God, thou knowest how far I am right, and how far wrong. I leave myself in thy hand, certain that thou wilt deal fairly, justly, lovingly with me, as a Father with his son. I do not pretend to be better than I am: neither will I pretend to be worse than I am. Truly, I know nothing about it. I, ignorant human being that I am, can never fully know how far I am right, and how far wrong. I find light and darkness fighting together in my heart, and I cannot divide between them. But thou canst. Thou knowest. Thou hast made me; thou lovest me; thou hast sent thy Son into the world to make me what I ought to be; and therefore I believe that he will make me what I ought to be. Thou willest not that I should perish, but come to the knowledge of the truth: and therefore I believe that I shall not perish, but come to the knowledge of the truth about thee, about my own character, my own duty, about everything which it is needful for me to know. And therefore I will go boldly on, doing my duty as well as I can, though not perfectly, day by day; and asking thee day by day to feed my soul with its daily bread. Thou feedest my soul with ITS daily bread. How much more then wilt thou feed my mind and my heart, more precious by far than my body? Yes, I will trust thee for soul and for body alike; and if I need correcting for my sins, I am sure at least of this, that the worst thing that can happen to me or any man, is to do wrong and NOT to be corrected; and the best thing is to be set right, even by hard blows, as often as I stray out of the way. And therefore I will take my punishment quietly and manfully, and try to thank thee for it, as I ought; for I know that thou wilt not punish me beyond what I deserve, but far below what I deserve; and that thou wilt punish me only to bring me to myself, and to correct me, and purge me, and strengthen me. For this I believe--on the warrant of thine own word I believe it--undeserved as the honour is, that thou art my Father, and lovest me; and dost not afflict any man willingly, or grieve the children of men out of passion or out of spite; and that thou willest not that I should be damned, nor any man; but willest have all men saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth.

SERMON XII. TRUE REPENTANCE

EZEKIEL xviii. 27.

When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness which he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.

We hear a great deal about repentance, and how necessary it is for a man to repent of his sins; for unless a man repent, he cannot be forgiven. But do we all of us really know what repentance means?

I sometimes fear not. I sometimes fear, that though this text stands at the opening of the Church service, and though people hear it as often as any text in the whole Bible, yet they have not really learnt the lesson which God sends them by it.

What, then, does repentance mean?

'Being sorry for what we have done wrong,' say some.

But is that all? I suppose there are few wicked things done upon earth, for which the doers of them are not sorry, sooner or later. A man does a wrong thing, and his conscience pricks him, and makes him uneasy, and he says in his heart, 'I wish after all I had left that alone.' But the next time he is tempted to do the same thing, he does it, and is ashamed of himself afterwards again: but that is not repentance. I suppose that there have been few murders committed in the world, after which sooner or later the murderer did not say in his heart--'Ah, that that man were alive and well again!' But that is not repentance.

For aught I can tell, the very devil is sorry for his sin;-- discontented, angry with himself, ashamed of himself for being a devil. He may be so to all eternity, and yet never repent. For the dark uneasy feeling which comes over every man sooner or later, after doing wrong, is not repentance; it is remorse; the most horrible and miserable of all feelings, when it comes upon a man in its full strength; the feeling of hating oneself, being at war with oneself, and with all the world, and with God who made it.

But that will save no man's soul alive. Repentance will save any and every soul alive, then and there: but remorse will not. Remorse may only kill him. Kill his body, by making him, as many a poor creature has done, put an end to himself in sheer despair: and kill his soul at least, by making him say in his heart, 'Well, if bad I am, bad I must be. I hate myself, and God hates me also. All I can do is, to forget my unhappiness if I can, in business, in pleasure, in drink, and drive remorse out of my head;' and often a man succeeds in so doing. The first time he does a wrong thing, he feels sorry and ashamed after it. Then he takes courage after awhile, and does it again; and feels less sorrow and shame; and so again and again, till the sin becomes easier and easier to him, and his conscience grows more and more dull; till at last perhaps, the feeling of its being wrong quite dies within--and that is the death of his soul.

But of true repentance, it is written, that he who repents shall save his soul ALIVE. And how?

The word for repentance in Scripture means simply a change of mind. To change one's mind is, in Scripture words, to repent.

Now if a man changes his mind, he changes his conduct also. If you set out to go to a place and change your mind, then you do not go there. If as you go on, you begin to have doubts about its being right to go, or to be sorry that you are going, and still walk on in the same road, however slowly or unwillingly, that is not changing your mind about going. If you do change your mind, you will change your steps. You will turn back, or turn off, and go some other road.

This may seem too simple to talk of. But if it be, why do not people act upon it? If a man finds that in his way through life he is on the wrong road, the road which leads to shame, and sorrow, and death and hell, why will he confess that he is on the wrong road, and say that he is very sorry (as perhaps he really may be) that he is going wrong, and yet go on, and persevere on the wrong path? At least, as long as he keeps on the road which leads to ruin, he has not changed his mind, or repented at all. He may find the road unpleasant, full of thorns, and briars, and pit-falls; for believe me, however broad the road is which leads to destruction, it is only the GATE of it which is easy and comfortable; it soon gets darker and rougher, that road of sin; and the further you walk along it, the uglier and more wretched a road it is: but all the misery which it gives to a man is only useless remorse, unless he fairly repents, and turns out of that road into the path which leads to life.

Now the one great business of foolish man in all times has been to save his soul (as he calls it) without doing right; to go to heaven (as he calls it) without walking the road which leads to heaven. It is a folly and a dream. For no man can get to heaven, unless he be heavenly; and being heavenly is simply being good, and neither more or less. And sin is death, and no man can save his soul alive, while it is dead in sin. Still men have been trying to do it in all ages and countries; and as soon as one plan has failed, they have tried some new one; and have invented some false repentance which was to serve instead of the true one. The old Jews seem to have thought that the repentance which God required was burnt-offerings and sacrifices: that if they could only offer bullocks and goats enough on God's altar, he would forgive them their sins. But David, and Isaiah after him, and Ezekiel after him, found out that THAT was but a dream; that that sort of repentance would save no man's soul; that God did not require burnt-offerings and sacrifice for sin: but simply that a man should do right and not wrong. 'When ye come before me,' saith the Lord, 'who has required this at your hand, to tread my courts?' They were to bring no more vain offerings: but to put away the evil of their doings; to cease to do evil, to learn to do well; to seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow; and then, and then only, though their sins were as scarlet, they should be white as snow. For God would take them for what they were--as good, if they were good; as bad, if they were bad. And this agrees exactly with the text. 'When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness which he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.'

The Papists again, thought that the repentance which God required, was for a man to punish himself bitterly for his sins; to starve and torture himself, to give up all that makes life pleasant, and so to

atone. And good and pious men and women, with a real hatred and horror of sin, tried this: but they found that making themselves miserable took away their sins no more than burnt-offerings and sacrifices would do it. Their consciences were not relieved; they gained no feeling of comfort, no assurance of God's love. Then they said, 'I have not punished myself enough. I have not made myself miserable enough. I will try whether more torture and misery will not wipe out my sins.' And so they tried again, and failed again, and then tried harder still, till many a noble man and woman in old times killed themselves piecemeal by slow torments, in trying to atone for their sins, and wash out in their own blood what was already washed out in the blood of Jesus Christ. But on the whole, that was found to be a failure. And now the great mass of the Papists have fallen back on the wretched notion that repentance merely means confessing their sins to a priest, and receiving absolution from him, and doing some little penance too childish to speak of here.

But is there no false repentance among us English, too, my friends? No paltry substitute for the only true repentance which God will accept, which is, turning round and doing right? How many there are, who feel--'I am very wrong. I am very sinful. I am on the road to hell. I am quarrelling and losing my temper, and using bad language.--Or--I am cheating my neighbour. Or--I am living in adultery and drunkenness: I must repent before it is too late.' But what do they mean by repenting? Coming as often as they can to church or chapel, and reading all the religious books which they can get hold of: till they come, from often reading and hearing about the Gospel promises, to some confused notion that their sins are washed away in Christ's blood; or perhaps, on the strength of some violent feelings, believe that they are converted all on a sudden, and clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness, and renewed by God's Spirit, and that now they belong to the number of believers, and are among God's elect.

Now, my dear friends, I complain of no one going to hear all the good they can; I complain of no one reading all the religious books they can: but I think--and more, I know--that hearing sermons and reading tracts may be, and is often, turned into a complete snare of the devil by people who do not wish to give up their sins and do right, but only want to be comfortable in their sins.

Hear sermons if you will; read good books if you will: but bear in mind, that you know already quite enough to lead you to REPENTANCE. You need neither book nor sermon to teach you those ten commandments which hang here over the communion table: all that books and tracts and sermons can do is to teach you how to KEEP those commandments in spirit and in truth: but I am sure I have seen people read books, and run about to sermons, in order to enable them to forget those ten commandments; in order to find excuses for not keeping them; and to find doctrines which tell them, that because Christ has done all, they need do nothing;--only FEEL a little thankfulness, and a little sorrow for sin, and a little liking to hear about religion: and call that repentance, and conversion, and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Now, my dear friends, let me ask you as reasonable beings, Do you think that hearing me or any man preach, can save your souls alive? Do you think that sitting over a book for an hour a day, or all day long, will save your souls alive? Do you think that your sins are

washed away in Christ's blood, when they are there still, and you are committing them? Would they be here, and you doing them, if they were put away? Do you think that your sins can be put away out of God's sight, if they are not even put out of your own sight? If you are doing wrong, do you think that God will treat you as if you were doing right? Cannot God see in you what you see in yourselves? Do you think a man can be clothed in Christ's righteousness at the very same time that he is clothed in his own unrighteousness? Can he be good and bad at once? Do you think a man can be converted--that is turned round--when he is going on his old road the whole week? Do you think that a man has repented--that is, changed his mind--when he is in just the same mind as ever as to how he shall behave to his family, his customers, and everybody with whom he has to do? Do you think that a man is renewed by God's Spirit, when except for a few religious phrases, and a little more outside respectability, he is just the old man, the same character at heart he ever was? Do you think that there is any use in a man's belonging to the number of believers, if he does not do what he believes; or any use in thinking that God has elected and chosen him, when he chooses not to do what God has chosen that every man must do, or die?

Be not deceived. God is not mocked. What a man sows, that shall he reap. Let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as Christ is righteous, and no one else.

He who tries to do as Christ did, and he only, has Christ's righteousness imputed to him, because he is trying to do what Christ did, that which is lawful and right. He who does righteousness, and he only, has truly repented, changed his mind about what he should do, and turned away from his wickedness which he has committed, and is now doing that which is lawful and right. He who does righteousness, and he only, shall save his soul alive: not by feeling this thing, or believing about that thing, but by doing that which is lawful and right.

We must face it, my dear friends. We cannot deceive God: and God will certainly not deceive himself. He sees us as we are, and takes us for what we are. What is right in us, he accepts for the salvation of Jesus Christ, in whom we are created unto good works. What is wrong in us, he will assuredly punish, and give us the exact reward of the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or evil. Every work of ours shall come into judgment, unless it be repented of, and put away by the only true repentance--not doing the thing any more.

God, I say, will judge righteous judgment, and take us as we are.

For the sake of Jesus the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, there is full, free, and perfect forgiveness for every sin, when we give it up. As soon as a man turns round, and, instead of doing wrong, tries to do right, he need be under no manner of fear or terror any more. He is taken back into his Father's house as freely and graciously as the prodigal son in the parable was. Whatsoever dark score there was against him in God's books is wiped out there and then, and he starts clear, a new man, with a fresh chance of life. And whosoever tells him that the score is not wiped out, lies, and contradicts flatly God's holy word. But as long as a man does NOT give up his sins, the dark score DOES stand against him in God's books; and no praying, reading, devoutness of any kind will wipe it

out; and as long as he sins, he is still in his sins, and his sins will be his ruin. Whosoever tells him that they are wiped out, he too lies, and contradicts flatly God's holy word.

For God is just, and true; and therefore God takes us for what we are, and will do so to all eternity; and you will find it so, my dearest friends. In spite of all doctrines which men have invented, and then pretended to find in the Bible, to drug men's consciences, and confuse God's clear light in their hearts, you will find, now and for ever, that if you do right you will be happy even in the midst of sorrow; if you do wrong, you will be miserable even in the midst of pleasure. Oh believe this, my dear friends, and do not rashly count on some sudden magical change happening to you as soon as you die to make you fit for heaven. There is not one word in the Bible which gives us reason to suppose that we shall not be in the next world the same persons which we have made ourselves in this world. If we are unjust here, we shall, for aught we know, or can know, try to be unjust there; if we be filthy here, we shall be so there; if we be proud here, we shall be so there; if we be selfish here, we shall be so there. What we sow here, we shall reap there. And it is good for us to know this, and face this. Anything is good for us, however unpleasant it may be, which drives us from the only real misery, which is sin and selfishness, to the only true happiness, which is the everlasting life of Christ; a pure, loving, just, generous, useful life of goodness, which is the righteousness of Christ, and the glory of Christ, and which will be our righteousness and our glory also for ever: but only if we live it; only if we be useful as Christ was, generous as Christ was, just as Christ was, gentle as Christ was, pure as Christ was, loving as Christ was, and so put on Christ, not in name and in word, but in spirit and in truth, that having worn Christ's likeness in this world, we may share his victory over all evil in the life to come.

SERMON XIII. THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

(Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.)

II COR. iii. 6.

God, who hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

When we look at the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel for to-day one after the other, we do not see, perhaps, what they have to do with each other. But they have to do with each other. They agree with each other. They explain each other. They all three tell us what God is like, and what we are to believe about God, and why we are to have faith in God.

The Collect tells of a God who is more ready to hear than we are to pray; and is 'wont to give'--that is, usually, and as a matter of course, every day and all day long, gives us--'more than either we desire or deserve,' of a God who gives and forgives, abundant in mercy. It bids us, when we pray to God, remember that we are praying

to a perfectly bountiful, perfectly generous God.

Some people worship quite a different God to that. They fancy that God is hard; that he sits judging each man by the letter of the law; watching and marking down every little fault which they commit; extreme to mark what is done amiss; and that in the very face of Scripture, which says that God is NOT extreme to mark what is done amiss; for if he were, who could abide it?

Their notion of God is, that he is very like themselves; proud, grudging, hard to be entreated, expecting everything from men, but not willing to give without a great deal of continued asking and begging, and outward reverence, and scrupulous fear lest he should be offended unexpectedly at the least mistake; and they fancy, like the heathen, that they shall be heard for their much speaking. They forget altogether that God is their Father, and knows what they need before they ask, and their ignorance in asking, and has (as any father fit to be called a father would have) compassion on their infirmities.

There is a great deal of this lip-service, and superstitious devoutness, creeping in now-a-days; a spirit of bondage unto fear. St. Paul warns us against it, and calls it will-worship, and voluntary humility. And I tell you of it, that it is not Christian at all, but heathen; and I say to you, as St. Paul bids me say, God, who made the world, and all therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing that he giveth to all life and breath, and all things. For in him we live and move, and have our being, and are the offspring--the children--of God.

Away, then, with this miserable spirit of bondage and fear, which insults that good God which it pretends to honour; and in spirit and in truth, not with slavish crouchings and cringings, copied from the old heathen, let us worship THE FATHER.

But this leads us to the Epistle.

St. Paul tells us how it is that God is wont to give us more than we either desire or deserve: because he is the Lord and Giver of life, in whom all created things live and move and have their being. Therefore in the Epistle he tells us of a Spirit which gives life.

But some may ask, 'What life?'

The Gospel answers that, and says, 'All life.'

It tells us that our Lord Christ cared not merely for the life of men's souls, but for the life of their bodies. That wherever he went he brought with him, not merely health for men's souls by his teaching, but health for their bodies by his miracles. That when he saw a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, he sighed over him in compassion; and did not think it beneath him to cure that poor man of his infirmity, though it was no such very great one.

For he wished to show men that his heavenly Father cared for them altogether, body as well as soul; that all health and strength whatsoever came from him.

When we hear, therefore, of the Spirit giving life, we are not to fancy that means only some high devout spiritual life, or that God's Spirit has to do only with a few elect saints. That may be a very pleasant fancy for those who believe themselves to be the elect saints; but the message of the Gospel is far wider and deeper than that, or any other of vain man's narrow notions. It tells us that life--all life which we can see; all health, strength, beauty, order, use, power of doing good work in God's earthly world, come from the Spirit of God, just as much as the spiritual life which we cannot see--goodness, amiableness, purity, justice, virtue, power of doing work in God's heavenly world. This latter is the higher life: and the former the lower, though good and necessary in its place: but the lower, as well as the higher, is life; and comes from the Spirit of God, who gives life and breath to all things.

And now, perhaps, we may see what St. Paul meant, by his being a minister 'not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.'

Do you not see yet, my friends? Then I will tell you.

If I were to get up in this pulpit, and preach the terrors of the law, and the wrath of God, and hell fire: if I tried to bind heavy burdens on you, and grievous to be borne, crying--You MUST do this, you MUST feel that, you MUST believe the other--while I having fewer temptations and more education than you, touched not those burdens with one of my fingers; if I tried to make out as many sins as I could against you, crying continually, this was wrong, and that was wrong, making you believe that God is always on the watch to catch you tripping, and telling you that the least of your sins deserved endless torment--things which neither I nor any man can find in the Bible, nor in common justice, nor common humanity, nor elsewhere, save in the lying mouth of the great devil himself;--or if I put into your hands books of self-examination (as they are called) full of long lists of sins, frightening poor innocents, and defiling their thoughts and consciences, and making the heart of the righteous sad, whom God has not made sad;--if I, in plain English, had my mouth full of cursing and bitterness, threatening and fault-finding, and distrustful, and disrespectful, and insolent language about you my parishioners: why then I might fancy myself a Christian priest, and a minister of the Gospel, and a very able, and eloquent, and earnest one; and might perhaps gain for myself the credit of being a 'searching preacher,' by speaking evil of people who are most of them as good and better than I, and by taking a low, mean, false view of that human nature which God made in his own image, and Christ justified in his own man's flesh, and soul, and spirit; but instead of being an able minister of the New Covenant, or of the Spirit of God, I should be no such man, but the very opposite.

No. I should be one of those of whom the Psalmist says, 'Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness'--and also, 'Their feet are swift to shed blood.'

To shed blood; to kill with the letter which killeth; and your blood, if I did succeed in killing your souls, would be upon my foolish head.

For such preaching as that does kill.

It kills three things.

1. It kills the Gospel. It turns the good news of God into the very worst news possible, and the ministrations of righteousness into the ministrations of condemnation.

2. It kills the souls of the congregation--or would kill them, if God's wisdom and love were not stronger than his minister's folly and hardness. For it kills in them self-respect and hope, and makes them say to themselves, 'God has made me bad, and bad I must be. Let me eat and drink, for to-morrow I die. God requires all this of me, and I cannot do it. I shall not try to do it. I shall take my chance of being saved at last, I know not how.' It frightens people away from church, from religion, from the very thought of God. It sets people on spying out their neighbours' faults, on judging and condemning, on fancying themselves righteous and despising others; and so kills in them faith, hope, and charity, which are the very life of their spirits.

3. And by a just judgment, it kills the soul of the preacher also. It makes him forget who he is, what God has set him to do; and at last, even who God is. It makes him fancy that he is doing God's work, while he is simply doing the work of the devil, the slanderer and accuser of the brethren; judging and condemning his congregation, when God has said, 'Judge not and ye shall not be judged, condemn not and ye shall not be condemned.' It makes him at last like the false God whom he has been preaching (for every man at last copies the God in whom he believes), dark and deceiving, proud and cruel;--and may the Lord have mercy upon his soul!

But I will tell you how I can be an able minister of the New Testament, and of the Spirit who gives life.

If I say to you--and I do say it now, and will say it as long as I am here--Trust God, because God is good; obey God, because God is good.

I preach to you the good God of the Collect, even your heavenly Father; who needs not be won over or appeased by anything which you can do, for he loves you already for the sake of his dear Son, whose members you are. He will not hear you the more for your much speaking, for he knows your necessities before you ask, and your ignorance in asking. He will not judge you according to the letter of Moses' law, or any other law whatsoever, but according to the spirit of your longings and struggles after what is right. He will not be extreme to mark what you do amiss, but will help you to mend it, if you desire to mend; setting you straight when you go wrong, and helping you up when you fall, if only your spirit is struggling after what is right.

This all-good heavenly Father I preach to you, and I say to you, Trust HIM.

I preach to you a Spirit who is the Lord and Giver of life; who hates death, and therefore wills not that you should die; who has given you all the life you have, all health and strength of body, all wit and power of mind, all right, pure, loving, noble feelings of heart and spirit, and who is both able and willing to keep them alive and healthy in you for ever.

This all-good Spirit of life I preach to you; and I say to you, Trust HIM.

I preach to you a Son of God, who is the likeness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; in order that by seeing him and how good he is, you may see your heavenly Father, and how good he is likewise; a Son of God who is your Saviour and your Judge; who judges you that he may save you, and saves you by judging you; who has all power given to him in heaven and earth, and declares that almighty power most chiefly by showing mercy and pity; who, when he was upon earth, made the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the blind to see; who ate and drank with publicans and sinners, and was the friend of all mankind; a Son of God who has declared everlasting war against disease, ignorance, sin, death, and all which makes men miserable. Those are his enemies; and he reigns, and will reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet, and there is nothing left in God's universe but order and usefulness, health and beauty, knowledge and virtue, in the day when God shall be all in all.

This all-good Son of God I preach to you, and I say to you, Trust HIM, and obey him. Obey him, not lest he should become angry and harm you, like the false gods of the heathen, but because his commandments are life; because he has made them for your good.

Oh! when will people understand that--that God has not made laws out of any arbitrariness, but for our good?--That his commandments are LIFE? David of old knew as much as that. Why do not we know more, instead of knowing, most of us, much less? It is simple enough, if you will but look at it with simple minds. God has made us; and if he had not loved us, he would not have made us at all. God has sent us into the world; and if he had not loved us, he would not have sent us into the world at all. In him we live, and move, and have our being, and are the offspring and children of God. And therefore God alone knows what is good for us; what is the good life, the wholesome, the safe, the right, the everlasting life for us. And he sends his Son to tell us--This is the right life; a life like Christ's; a life according to God's Spirit; and if you do not live that life you will die, not only body but soul also, because you are not living the life which God meant for you when he made you. Just as if you eat the wrong food, you will kill your bodies; so if you think the wrong thoughts, and feel the wrong feelings, and therefore do the wrong things, you will kill your own souls. God will not kill you; you will kill yourselves. God grudges you nothing. God does not wish to hurt you, wish to punish you. He wishes you to live and be happy; to live for ever, and be happy for ever. But as your body cannot live unless it be healthy, so your soul cannot live unless it be healthy. And it cannot be healthy unless it live the right life. And it cannot live the right life without the right spirit. And the only right spirit is the Spirit of God himself the Spirit of your Father in heaven, who will make you, as children should be, like your Father.

But that Spirit is not far from any of you. In him you live, and move, and have your being already. Were he to leave you for a moment you would die, and be turned again to your dust. From him comes all the good of body and soul which you have already. Trust him for more. Ask him for more. Go boldly to the throne of his grace, remembering that it is a throne of GRACE, of kindness, tenderness,

patience, bountiful love, and wealth without end. Do not think that he is hard of hearing, or hard of giving. How can he be? For he is the Spirit of the all-generous Father and of the all-generous Son, and has given, and gives now; and delights to give, and delights to be asked. He is the charity of God; the boundless love by which all things consist; and, like all love, becomes more rich by spending, and glorifies himself by giving himself away; and has sworn by himself--that is, by his own eternal and necessary character, which he cannot alter or unmake--'This is the new covenant which I will make with my people. I will write my laws in their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and I will dwell with them, and be their God.'

Oh, my friends, take these words to yourselves; and trust in that good Father in heaven, whose love sent you into this world, and gave you the priceless blessing of life; whose love sent his Son to show you the pattern of life, and to redeem you freely from all your sins; whose love sends his Spirit to give you the power of leading the everlasting life, and will raise you up again, body and soul, to that same everlasting life after death. Trust him, for he is your Father. Whatever else he is, he is that. He has bid you call him that, and he will hear you. If you forget that he is your Father, you forget him, and worship a false God of your own invention. And whenever you doubt; whenever the devil, or ignorant preachers, or superstitious books, make you afraid, and tempt you to fancy that God hates you, and watches to catch you tripping, take refuge in that blessed name, and say, 'Satan, I defy thee; for the Almighty God of heaven is my Father.'

SERMON XIV. HEROES AND HEROINES (Whitsunday.)

PSALM xxxii. 8.

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go:
I will guide thee with mine eye.

This is God's promise; which he fulfilled at sundry times and in different manners to all the men of the old world who trusted in him. He informed them; that is, he put them into right form, right shape, right character, and made them the men which they were meant to be. He taught them in the way in which they ought to go. He guided them where they could not guide themselves.

But God fulfilled this promise utterly and completely on the first Whitsuntide, when the Holy Spirit came down on the apostles.

That was an extraordinary and special gift; because the apostles had to do an extraordinary and special work. They had to preach the Gospel to all nations, and therefore they wanted tongues with which to speak to all nations; at least to those of their countrymen who came from foreign parts, and spoke foreign tongues, that they might carry home the good news of Christ into all lands. And they wanted tongues of fire, too, to set their own hearts on fire with divine zeal and earnestness, and to set on fire the hearts of those who

heard them.

But that was an extraordinary gift. There was never anything like it before; nor has been, as far as we know, since; because it has not been needed.

It is enough for us to know, that the apostles had what they needed. God called and sent them to do a great work: and therefore, being just and merciful, he gave them the power which was wanted for that great work.

But if that is a special case; if there has been nothing like it since, what has Whitsuntide to do with us? We need no tongues of fire, and we shall have none on this Whitsunday or any Whitsunday. Has Whitsunday then no blessing for us? Do we get nothing by it? God forbid, my friends.

We get what the apostles got, and neither more nor less; though not in the same shape as they did.

God called them to do a work: God calls us, each of us, to do some work.

God gave them the Holy Spirit to make them able to do their work. God gives US the Holy Spirit, to make us able to do OUR work, whatsoever that may be.

As their day, so their strength was: as our day is, so our strength shall be.

For instance. -

How often one sees a person--a woman, say--easy and comfortable, enjoying life, and taking little trouble about anything, because she has no need. And when one looks at such a woman, one is apt to say hastily in one's heart, 'Ah, she does not know what sorrow is--and well for her she does not; for she would make but a poor fight if trouble came on her; she would make but a poor nurse if she had to sit months by a sick bed. She would become down-hearted, and peevish, and useless. There is no strength in her to stand in the evil day.'

And perhaps that woman would say so of herself. She might be painfully afraid of the thought of affliction; she might shrink from the notion of having to nurse any one; from having to give up her own pleasure and ease for the sake of others; and she would say of herself, as you say of her, 'What would become of me if sorrow came? _I_ have no strength to stand in the evil day.'

Yes, my friends, and you say true, and she says true. And yet not true either. She has no strength to stand: but she will stand nevertheless, for God is able to make her stand. As her day, so her strength shall be. A day of suffering, anxiety, weariness, all but despair may come to her. But in that day she shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire; and then you shall be astonished, and she shall be astonished, at what she can do, and what she can endure; because God's Spirit will give her a right judgment in all things, and enable her, even in the midst of her sorrow, to rejoice in his holy comfort. And people will call her--those at least who know her--

-a 'heroine.' And they speak truly and well, and give her the right and true name. Why, I will tell you presently.

Or how often it happens to a man to be thrown into circumstances which he never expected. An officer, perhaps, in war time in a foreign land--in India now. He has a work to do: a heavy, dangerous, difficult, almost hopeless work. He does not like it. He is afraid of it. He wishes himself anywhere but where he is. He has little or no hope of succeeding; and if he fails, he fears that he will be blamed, misunderstood, slandered. But he feels he must go through with it. He cannot turn back; he cannot escape. As the saying is, the bull is brought to the stake, and he must bide the baiting.

At first, perhaps, he tries to buoy himself up. He begins his work in a little pride and self-conceit, and notion of his own courage and cunning. He tries to fancy himself strong enough for anything. He feeds himself up with the thought of what people will say of him; the hope of gaining honour and praise: and that is not altogether a wrong feeling--God forbid!

But the further the man gets into his work, the more difficult it grows, and the more hopeless he grows. He finds himself weak, when he expected to be strong; puzzled when he thought himself cunning. He is not sure whether he is doing right. He is afraid of responsibility. It is a heavy burden on him, too heavy to bear. His own honour and good name may depend upon a single word which he speaks. The comfort, the fortune, the lives of human beings may depend on his making up his mind at an hour's notice to do exactly the right thing at the right time. People round him may be mistaking him, slandering him, plotting against him, rebelling against him, even while he is trying to do them all the good he can. Little comfort does he get then from the thought of what people at home may say of him. He is set in the snare, and he cannot find his way out. He is at his own wits' end; and from whence shall he get fresh wits? Who will give him a right judgment in all things? Who will give him a holy comfort in which he can rejoice?--a comfort which will make him cheerful, because he knows it is a right comfort, and that he is doing right? His heart is sinking within him, getting chill and cold with despair. Who will put fresh fire and spirit into it?

God will. When he has learnt how weak he is in himself, how stupid he is in himself;--ay, bitter as it is to a brave man to have to confess it, how cowardly he is in himself--then, when he has learnt the golden lesson, God will baptize him with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

A time will come to that man, when, finding no help in himself, no help in man, he will go for help to God.

Old words which he learnt at his mother's knee come back to him--old words that he almost forgot, perhaps, in the strength and gaiety of his youth and prosperity. And he prays. He prays clumsily enough, perhaps. He is not accustomed to praying; and he hardly knows what to ask for, or how to ask for it. Be it so. In that he is not so very much worse off than others. What did St. Paul say, even of himself? 'We know not how to ask for anything as we ought: but the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered'--too deep for words. Yes, in every honest heart there are

longings too deep for words. A man knows he wants something: but knows not what he wants. He cannot find the right words to say to God. Let him take comfort. What he does not know, the Holy Spirit of Whitsuntide--the Spirit of Jesus Christ--does know. Christ knows what we want, and offers our clumsy prayers up to our heavenly Father, not in the shape in which we put them, but as they ought to be, as we should like them to be; and our Father hears them.

Yes. Our Father hears the man who cries to him, however clumsily, for light and strength to do his duty. So it is; so it has been always; so it will be to the end. And then as the man's day, so his strength will be. He may be utterly puzzled, utterly down-hearted, utterly hopeless: but the day comes to him in which he is baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire. He begins to have a right judgment; to see clearly what he ought to do, and how to do it. He grows more shrewd, more prompt, more steady than he ever has been before. And there comes a fire into his heart, such as there never was before; a spirit and a determination which nothing can daunt or break, which makes him bold, cheerful, earnest, in the face of the anxiety and danger which would have, at any other time, broken his heart. The man is lifted up above himself, and carried on through his work, he hardly knows how, till he succeeds nobly, or if he fails, fails nobly; and be the end as it may, he gets the work done which God has given him to do.

And then when he looks back, he is astonished at himself. He wonders how he could dare so much; wonders how he could endure so much; wonders how the right thought came into his head at the right moment. He hardly knows himself again. It seems to him, when he thinks over it all, like a grand and awful dream. And the world is astonished at him likewise. They cry, 'Who would have thought there was so much in this man? who would have expected such things of him?' And they call him a hero--and so he is.

Yes, the world is right, more right than it thinks in both sayings. Who would have expected there was so much in the man? For there was not so much in him, till God put it there.

And again they are right, too; more right than they think in calling that man a hero, or that woman a heroine.

For what is the old meaning, the true meaning of a hero or a heroine?

It meant--and ought to mean--one who is a son or a daughter of God, and whom God informs and strengthens, and sends out to do noble work, teaching them the way wherein they should go. That was the right meaning of a hero and of a heroine even among the old heathens. Let it mean the same among us Christians, when we talk of a hero; and let us give God the glory, and say--There is a man who has entered, even if it be but for one day's danger and trial, into the blessings of Whitsuntide and the power of God's Spirit; a man whom God has informed and taught in the way wherein he should go. May that same God give him grace to abide herein all the days of his life!

Yes, my friends, may God give us all grace to understand Whitsuntide, and feed on the blessings of Whitsuntide; not merely once in a way, in some great sorrow, great danger, great struggle, great striving point of our lives; but every day and all day long, and to rejoice in the power of his Spirit, till it becomes to us--

would that it could to-day become to us;--like the air we breathe; till having got our life's work done, if not done perfectly, yet still done, we may go hence to receive the due reward of our deeds.

SERMON XV. THE MEASURE OF THE CROSS

EPHESIANS iii. 18, 19.

That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.

These words are very deep, and difficult to understand; for St. Paul does not tell us exactly of what he is speaking. He does not say what it is, the breadth and length, and depth, and height of which we are to comprehend and take in. Only he tells us afterwards what will come of our taking it in; we shall know the love of Christ.

And therefore many great fathers and divines, whose names there is no need for me to tell you, but whose opinions we must always respect, have said that what St. Paul is speaking of is, the Cross of Christ.

Of course they do not mean the wood of which the actual cross was made. They mean the thing of which the cross was a sign and token.

Now of what is the cross a token?

Of the love of Christ, which is the love of God.

But of what kind of love?

Not the love which is satisfied with sitting still and enjoying itself, as long as nothing puts it out, and turns its love to anger-- what we call mere good nature and good temper; not that, not that, my friends: but love which will dare, and do, and yearn, and mourn; love which cannot rest; love which sacrifices itself; love which will suffer, love which will die, for what it loves;--such love as a father has, who perishes himself to save his drowning child.

Now the cross of Christ is a token to us, that God's love to us is like that: a love which will dare anything, and suffer anything, for the sake of saving sinful man.

And therefore it is, that from the earliest times the cross has been the special sign of Christians. We keep it up still, when we make the sign of the cross on children's foreheads in baptism: but we have given up using the sign of the cross commonly, because it was perverted, in old times, into a superstitious charm. Men worshipped the cross like an idol, or bits of wood which they fancied were pieces of the actual cross, while they were forgetting what the cross meant. So the use of the cross fell into disrepute, and was put down in England.

But that is no reason why we should forget what the cross meant, and means now, and will mean for ever. Indeed, the better Christians,

the better men we are, the more will Christ's cross fill us with thoughts which nothing else can give us; thoughts which we are glad enough, often, to forget and put away; so bitterly do they remind us of our own laziness, selfishness, and love of pleasure.

But still, the cross is our sign. It is God's everlasting token to us, that he has told us Christians something about himself which none of the wisest among the heathen knew; which infidels now do not know; which nothing but the cross can teach to men.

There were men among the old heathens who believed in one God; and some of them saw that he must be, on the whole, a good and a just God. But they could not help thinking of God (with very rare exceptions) as a respecter of persons, a God who had favourites; and at least, that he was a God who loved his friends, and hated his enemies. So the Mussulmans believe now. So do the Jews; indeed, so they did all along, though they ought to have known better; for their prophets in the Old Testament told them a very different tale about God's love.

But that was all they could believe--in a God who was not unjust or wicked, but was at least hard, proud, unbending: while the notion that God could love his enemies, and bless those who used him despitefully and persecuted him--much less die for his enemies--that would have seemed to them impossible and absurd. They stumbled at the stumbling-block of the cross. God, they thought, would do to men as they did to him. If they loved him, he would love them. If they neglected him, he would hate and destroy them.

But when the apostles preached the Gospel, the good news of Christ crucified, they preached a very different tale; a tale quite new; utterly different from any that mankind had ever heard before.

St. Paul calls it a mystery--a secret--which had been hidden from the foundation of the world till then, and was then revealed by God's Spirit; namely, this boundless love of God, shown by Christ's dying on the cross.

And, he says, his great hope, his great business, the thing on which his heart was set, and which God had sent him into the world to do, was this--to make people know the love of Christ; to look at Christ's cross, and take in its breadth, and length, and depth, and height. It passes knowledge, he says. We shall never know the whole of it--never know all that God's love has done, and will do: but the more we know of it, the more blessed and hopeful, the more strong and earnest, the more good and righteous we shall become.

And what is the breadth of Christ's cross? My friends, it is as broad as the whole world; for he died for the whole world, as it is written, 'He is a propitiation not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world;' and again, 'God willeth that none should perish;' and again, 'As by the offence judgment came on all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one, the gift came upon all men to justification of life.'

And that is the breadth of Christ's cross.

And what is the length of Christ's cross? The length thereof, says an old father, signifies the time during which its virtue will last.

How long, then, is the cross of Christ? Long enough to last through all time. As long as there is a sinner to be saved; as long as there is ignorance, sorrow, pain, death, or anything else which is contrary to God and hurtful to man, in the universe of God, so long will Christ's cross last. For it is written, he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet; and God is all in all. And that is the length of the cross of Christ.

And how high is Christ's cross? As high as the highest heaven, and the throne of God, and the bosom of the Father--that bosom out of which for ever proceed all created things. Ay, as high as the highest heaven; for--if you will receive it--when Christ hung upon the cross, heaven came down on earth, and earth ascended into heaven. Christ never showed forth his Father's glory so perfectly as when, hanging upon the cross, he cried in his death-agony, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Those words showed the true height of the cross; and caused St. John to know that his vision was true, and no dream, when he saw afterwards in the midst of the throne of God a lamb as it had been slain.

And that is the height of the cross of Christ.

And how deep is the cross of Christ?

This is a great mystery, and one which people in these days are afraid to look at; and darken it of their own will, because they will neither believe their Bibles, nor the voice of their own hearts.

But if the cross of Christ be as high as heaven, then, it seems to me, it must also be as deep as hell, deep enough to reach the deepest sinner in the deepest pit to which he may fall. We know that Christ descended into hell. We know that he preached to the spirits in prison. We know that it is written, 'As in Adam all die, even so in

Christ shall all be made alive.' We know that when the wicked man turns from his wickedness, and does what is lawful and right, he will save his soul alive. We know that in the very same chapter God tells us that his ways are not unequal--that he has not one law for one man, and another for another, or one law for one year, and another for another. It is possible, therefore, that he has not one law for this life, and another for the life to come. Let us hope, then, that David's words may be true after all, when speaking by the Spirit of God, he says, not only, 'if I ascend up to heaven, thou art there;' but 'if I go down to hell, thou art there also;' and let us hope that THAT is the depth of the cross of Christ.

At all events, my friends, I believe that we shall find St. Paul's words true, when he says, that Christ's love passes knowledge; and therefore that we shall find this also;--that however broad we may think Christ's cross, it is broader still. However long, it is longer still. However high, it is higher still. However deep, it is deeper still. Yes, we shall find that St. Paul spoke solemn truth when he said, that Christ had ascended on high that he might fill all things; that Christ filled all in all; and that he must reign till the day when he shall give up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all.

And now do you take all this about the breadth and length of Christ's

cross to be only ingenious fancies, and a pretty play of words?

Ah, my friends, the day will come when you will find that the measure of Christ's cross is the most important question upon earth.

In the hour of death, and in the day of judgment; then the one thing which you will care to think of (if you can think at all then, as too many poor souls cannot, and therefore had best think of it now before their wits fail them)--the one thing which you will care to think of, I say, will be--not, how clever you have been, how successful you have been, how much admired you have been, how much money you have made:- 'Of course not,' you answer; 'I shall be thinking of the state of my soul; whether I am fit to die; whether I have faith enough to meet God; whether I have good works enough to meet God.'

Will you, my friend? Then you will soon grow tired of thinking of that likewise, at least I hope and trust that you will. For, however much faith you may have had, you will find that you have not had enough. However so many good works you may have done, you will find that you have not done enough. The better man you are, the more you will be dissatisfied with yourself; the more you will be ashamed of yourself; till with all saints, Romanist or Protestant, or other, who have been worthy of the name of saints, you will be driven--if you are in earnest about your own soul--to give up thinking of yourself, and to think only o

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