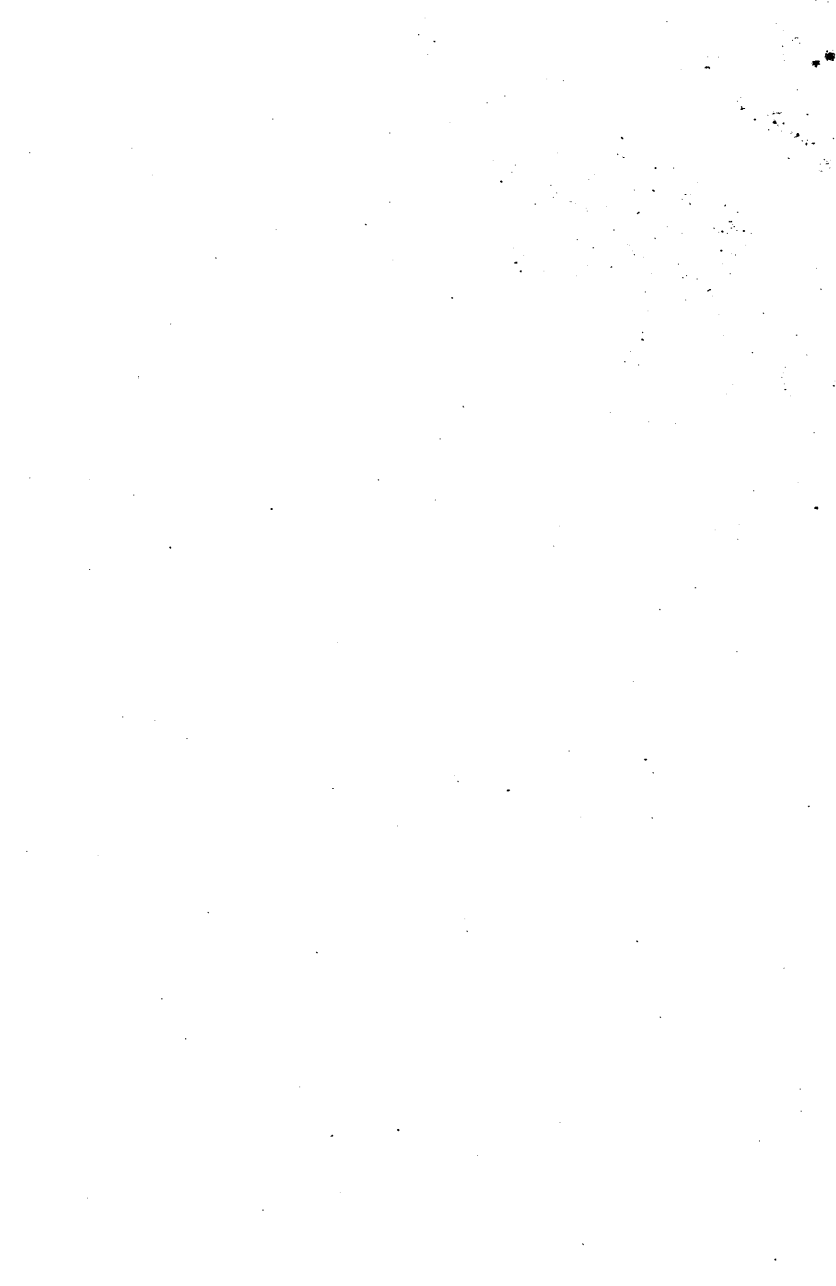


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P R E F A C E .

THE writer of the following papers trusts that a reason may be found for their publication in the circumstances which gave rise to them. In their original form they were merely private thoughts, noted down for personal use, whilst reading the 22nd and part of the 23rd Chapters of Saint Luke's Gospel. As such, they were, of course, wholly unfitted for any other purpose. But after publishing a little book, called "Thoughts for the Holy Week," the writer was urged to complete the work by adding "Thoughts for the remainder of Lent," and though it was not easy to comply with the request, which was, therefore, for the time, set aside,—it suggested the enlargement of the notes before mentioned, and they were in consequence brought into their present form.

They cannot, now, however, be called "Thoughts for Lent." The number of chapters extends beyond the Forty Days; and the subjects are not all such as would be especially suited to the season; but they are the nearest approach which the writer could make to the work which she had been requested to undertake, and as such they are published.

Although the subjects chosen are unconnected, and may often appear far-fetched, when compared with the text, yet they have been left unaltered as they suggested themselves, and were noted down from the feelings and circumstances of the moment; for when we speak to ourselves, either in warning or self-reproach, we are more likely to be true and earnest than when we attempt with a deliberate purpose to give uncalled-for advice to others.

BONCHURCH,
Jan. 12th 1860.

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PASSING THOUGHTS ON RELIGION.

THE CHIVALRY OF RELIGION.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 1, 2.

“Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill Him; for they feared the people.”

THE concluding chapters of the Gospel touch upon subjects so awful, that it may at first sight appear almost irreverent to obtrude our own thoughts in connection with them. But, like the whole of the Bible, they are mines containing treasures of infinite wisdom, for which we must search if we hope to find; and miserably imperfect as this search must necessarily be, yet, if undertaken in dependence upon God's assisting grace, we may dare to hope that even the humblest and most unworthy will, in some degree, be rewarded for their efforts. For we may remember that it is not always the depth or the novelty of a thought which constitutes its value to ourselves, but the fitness of its appli-

cation to our circumstances. And these circumstances vary continually, so that the thought which in the meditation of to-day has been vividly impressed upon us by outward events, may to-morrow, from the feebleness and versatility of our nature, be forgotten beyond recall. It cannot therefore be unprofitable to any of us to endeavour occasionally to perpetuate and put into definite words our passing thoughts. Our own ideas must, by such an exercise, become clearer, and our consciences may, perhaps, be more lastingly touched. The sermons which we preach to ourselves may be commonplace, but they can scarcely be ineffective; and if we would find texts for such sermons, we may search through the volume of God's word, and find none so impressive as those which describe the course of our Redeemer's Sufferings and Death.

One point especially brought forward in these opening verses of St. Luke, is the contrast between Our Blessed Lord's perfect innocence and the exceeding malice of the Chief Priests and Scribes. The perception of cruelty and treachery in our fellow-creatures affects us very keenly. Fierce envy of goodness unable to defend itself—harshness to a woman or a child—these things awake some of our best feelings, and show us that there is an indignation which is lawful. Yet it is strange how constantly we overlook the fact, that this same helplessness which touches us so quickly in other cases, was part of the infinite condescension of the Incarnation. Jesus could not struggle with his

enemies, as man might struggle with man; for such a contest involves feelings of wrath and bitterness, which are sin, and He was sinless. He would not contend with them as their God, because He had come to be their Saviour,—not their Judge; so it was that He was helpless by his own voluntary act; helpless as the feeble woman delivered over to the cruelty of armed ruffians, or the little child writhing in agony under the power of its wicked torturers. There must be very few indeed who do not know the feelings which such spectacles of malice excite. Even the tales of bygone days will arouse them; and no English person who has lived through the last few years can be insensible to or forget them. It must have been a very cold heart which was not stirred by the treachery, the horrible, deliberate cruelty, of an Indian massacre; yet those who planned it were heathens and infidels. The Jews who planned our Lord's death were the rulers of the chosen people of God! Most of us also probably have dwelt upon the heroism exhibited in those fearful Indian days. We have heard of men, having discovered falsity amongst those they had most trusted, yet placing themselves in the front of danger, calling on their soldiers to return to their duty; and at last seized by them, tortured, and killed. We must have felt that for such men we could devote our own lives; that to save them it would have been easy to die ourselves; and that to honour them now with the fullest, deepest reverence is but the common duty of us all.

Jesus knew every secret of men's hearts. The deliberate contrivances, the falsehood, the base hypocrisy which were lying in ambush to destroy Him, were all fully present to Him—yet He waited, day by day, and hour by hour, warning, exhorting, entreating, till the moment of open rebellion had arrived—and then, confronting His enemies, gave Himself up to death that we might live.

But we hear of this unmoved. The words seem to make no impression upon us. After reading them we go away and resume our usual occupations, and our hearts are light as they were before, and we have no wish to follow or avenge Him. This certainly is not what it should be. God has planted better feelings in the human breast, and He has shown us by experience that we possess them. It does not even require a personal experience to awaken them. Do not our hearts stir within us when we read of the captivity and death of our English monarch, or the crime which was the crowning wickedness of the French revolution? Let our political opinions be what they may, the sight of Majesty degraded, and helpless dignity oppressed, rouses a spirit which we are proud to acknowledge and to foster.

In days long past, chivalry was the expression of the same feeling. Where is our chivalry for Christ? Alas! it would seem that loyalty and devotion can be awakened in any—in every case, except one, and that unutterably the highest; and to account for such coldness there must be some-

thing far beyond natural causes ; it must surely in some way be connected with the actings of a fallen nature.

It may do us no harm to inquire further into this question. The sorrows and death of our English king have no direct claim upon us. We feel or do not feel them, as it may happen. But the sorrows of our Redeemer come before us with an appeal which it is sin to reject—to be indifferent, is to be ungrateful. Human experience says—that to make a man our enemy we must burden him with obligations. May it not be so with regard to our obligations to Christ? The idea perhaps is startling to us. We do not suppose that we are unwilling to acknowledge our vast debt of gratitude to our Saviour ; indeed, we speak continually as if it were the one thought uppermost in our hearts. But let us just ask ourselves whether there would not be a difference in the feeling which ordinary persons (not those of very refined and exalted feelings, but common people) would have towards a dethroned king, who came to them and threw himself upon their generosity, for sympathy and assistance, and one who called upon them to follow him because he had a *right* to their allegiance, and had heaped upon them unmerited favours. In the one case, pride would be a furtherance to sympathy ; in the other it would be a drawback. We are all by nature proud, and, not seeing our need of God and mercy, we feel no thankfulness for it. To go to a man wrapt up in

self-esteem and endeavour to awaken his feelings by a description of his Redeemer's sufferings and an appeal to human gratitude—will, therefore, in all probability prove useless. The feelings will scarcely be touched until the heart is thoroughly humbled by a sense of sin and the longing to escape from it;—then gratitude, love, and devotion, will follow naturally.

If this be true, it may be a guide to us in dealing with ourselves. No doubt when we are heartily and earnestly Christians, we shall love our Saviour, because He died for us; but if the feeling will not come without effort, we must teach ourselves, or rather, pray to God to teach us, how to acquire it. There are many ways of doing this. For instance, the weeks which precede Good Friday are a preparation for the events of that solemn day on which we mourn our Lord's death. The search into our own hearts,—the full understanding of our sinfulness in God's sight, which is required at the beginning of Lent, is the preparation for the deep sorrow which is to mourn for Jesus at its close. And this remembrance of sin may and must be kept up by discipline and self-denial. Our sins are Christ's enemies,—literally and truly so,—as much His enemies as the chief priests and scribes. If we take part with Him against them, we shall become earnest and loyal. How many sincere but lukewarm adherents of Charles the First probably became his devoted followers after the first battle which they fought in his defence! Loyalty, patriotism, devo-

tion to a cause, even party spirit, in its best form, all have in them the germ of the feeling, which, when properly directed, may lead us to devotion to Christ. When we struggle against a temptation and subdue it, with this thought in our hearts, that we are fighting for our Saviour, we shall have taken a most important step towards sympathising with and loving Him. When we practise some petty self-denial in remembrance of our sins, and with the thought of Him who died for them, all hardness, coldness, repugnance to such self-discipline will be over. We shall feel that we are arming ourselves for the combat with evil, as the knight of old prepared himself for his earthly conflict. And as he fasted, and prayed, and watched through the long night, and then following his leader to the field, fought and died, leaving his own name forgotten in the triumph of his lord;—so shall we also watch, and pray, and deny ourselves our luxury and ease, that,—fighting by His side,—we may die with but one thought of glory,—that of being numbered amongst those who have borne the Name and conquered under the Banner of Christ.

WILFUL SIN.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 3—6.

“Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray Him unto them in the absence of the multitude.”

Few of us, probably, fully face the fact of the existence of an Evil Spirit. We think of temptation as coming from ourselves, and from our own nature. The possibility of possession is so terrible that we shrink from it, and therefore put away from us the idea altogether. But whatever truths are revealed to us in Scripture must be for our good, and it cannot be right to set them aside. The very horror we feel when we fully place before our minds the existence of Satan, forces us to flee to our Saviour. He that is with us is stronger than he that is against us. This is the only thought to calm us, and yet to give us energy. We are to fight with the assurance of victory; but fight we must against a personal enemy, who takes advantage, by the very words we use, and the very habits of our daily life, to hide from us the fact, that we are fighting. We do not understand that we are ac-

tually engaged in a battle, because our ideas of warfare are earthly. We can form no idea of it except as connected with material objects. We think the expression to be figurative and allegorical, and thus it becomes unreal to us; and the very books which are put into our hands, describing Christian life under the image of conflict, are made the means of hiding from us the reality of the conflict.

No doubt there is a difficulty in distinguishing between the inclinations of fallen nature and the actual promptings of Satan. We shall scarcely do any good to ourselves by endeavouring to define where the one may end and the other begin: it is sufficient to know that we have two enemies to contend with, our own hearts and the spirit of evil; and that these are continually acting in concert to deceive us. But if we wish really to bring before our minds the greatness of our danger, we may take any one instance of sin, which we know to have been committed under the guidance of Satan—such, for instance, as the treachery of Judas—and observe how it was carried out when once the evil spirit had really taken possession of the human heart.

The point which may perhaps strike us the most is the deliberation, the slow thoughtfulness and consideration, with which the deed was planned by Judas. “He went his way”—he walked along the streets, not, as it would seem, hurriedly, but quietly directing his steps to the place where he knew he should find the chief priests and captains. If, as was most probably the case, they

had business to occupy them before they could see him, he waited till they were at leisure. There was no excitement or impulse in this; no sudden feeling of indignation or revenge. Sufficient time was given for conscience to work; but conscience was silent: for Judas had given himself up to the guidance of Satan. Then he was ushered into the presence of the rulers of the Jews. They were not his companions and equals; he could not rush to them and pour out all his guilty wishes; he was to be received by them with some formality; his errand was a matter of business; what we should call now a political affair, which, it might be said, concerned the safety of the state. The priests were sitting in council, ready to deliberate upon this and upon other weighty matters. Judas appeared, and the business was opened. He communed with them; he talked over what was to be done. Communing expresses a long consideration. Judas must have proposed his plans, and the priests theirs. The proposal must have been carefully discussed between them. Again, there is no eagerness, no haste; it is all done in a cool, sober, thoughtful spirit; only when every thing has been arranged, without, as it would seem, a chance of failure, some expression of satisfaction is evinced—"they were glad." In the fulness of their wicked joy at the prospect of having Him whom they hated in their power, they were willing then to grant the terms which Judas proposed—"they covenanted to give him money." He was satisfied, and he promised. Before, he

had only discussed, suggested, considered possibilities ; but now he promised, and he went forth from their presence, not merely the planner of a wicked deed for others, but the person who was actually to put it into effect. From that moment "he sought opportunity to betray Jesus unto them in the absence of the multitude." If there had been the slightest shade of regret before, probably it was now stifled by the remembrance of his promise. Satan can turn even a good principle into sin ; and many a man has been more unwilling to break a promise than to commit a grievous crime.

Upon a first consideration most of us probably would say that such deliberate wickedness has nothing to do with us ; that we have never planned any deed in the slightest degree approaching to the sin of Judas ; and no doubt this is so. It is not true, and therefore, it can never be right or useful to exaggerate sins. If we had fallen like Judas, we should not now be trying to search into our hearts, and desiring to amend our lives. We should be possessed by Satan, and there would be no repentance before us, only remorse. But on looking back at our past lives, there are few, probably, who will not be able to recall some wilful inattention to the warnings of conscience,—some decided agreement to do what was wrong (though it may have appeared but slight wrong)—which certainly must have been an offence of the same nature. We have perhaps wished very much for something which we knew it was not right for us

under the circumstances to enjoy. It may have been a day's pleasure, or the society of some particular person, or the reading of some forbidden book, or an extravagant and selfish purchase; and we have put ourselves in the way of obtaining our wish quietly and deliberately, not at once promising ourselves that we would obtain it, but thinking about it, talking of it, planning how it might be had, and at last pledging ourselves in some way with others, and in their co-operation finding our support for the sin we have resolved to commit. Now, though it would be quite wrong, one might almost say absurd, to place an act of this kind on a par with a heinous crime like that of Judas, yet it is very necessary for us to consider that it is the germ of the same state of mind. We are extremely particular with children in not allowing them to steal a sugar-plum, because we say that if they begin with small things they will end with large ones, and so will at last come to ruin. It is just the same with ourselves. Sin is a state of mind, not an outward act. The same sinful strength which leads us to crush conscience in small cases, will, if indulged, lead us to crush it also in others. Satan gives us that strength. He does not possess us—that through God's mercy he is not permitted to do, until after a long course of hardness and impenitence—but he assists us to grieve the Holy Spirit, and force Him, if we may venture so to speak, to depart from us. And then, when our weak nature is left to itself, he adds the power of

his own wickedness to our natural inclinations, and the sin is committed:—a small sin possibly, one that the world may never know, and if it did know, might probably laugh us to scorn for regretting—but a sin, the memory of which will cling to us through life; which will haunt us in seasons of anguish, and come before us in the watches of the night, and sting us with its reproaches in the brightest hours of day;—a pardoned sin it may be—God grant it to be so—but one which can never be forgotten; because it was cool, deliberate, and wilful, even like the sin of the traitor Judas.

An account was given not very long since by one who had suffered shipwreck, of the state of his mind as he clung to a plank, and was tossed about by the waves. His mother's voice was heard clear and close. She said to him: "Did you take the apples?" That was the voice of conscience, bringing back from the depths of memory the wilful sin of his early years.

Probably there is no such thing as forgetfulness,—if by forgetfulness we mean that which can never be recalled. It has been said that every word we utter causes some change in the elements which surround us, and leaves its trace throughout universal space. Certain it is that the actions which we say we have forgotten, do rise up again unbidden, and when we least expect them. They have been done, and they cannot be undone. A wilful sin, whether great or small, is a wilful strug-

gle with the Spirit of God, and it will be an act of His mercy so to leave the burning remembrance of the conflict and the defeat imprinted upon our conscience, as to bring us to repentance and to pardon.

SYMPATHY IN GLADNESS.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 7, 8.

“Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the Passover, that we may eat.”

SORROW and joy met when our Lord was upon earth, even as they do now. The passover was a public feast, a season for recalling great blessings, a period of rejoicing, which must have awakened in the Jewish people a considerable amount of national pride. It reminded them that they were the chosen people of God, and that He had worked specially for their deliverance; and carrying them back through long ages, it gave them that feeling of stability for which the human heart naturally longs. We should feel this latter point ourselves. If we now, as a nation, kept a feast, which had been celebrated ever since the time of Alfred the Great, it would awaken much deeper and more lasting satisfaction than any commemoration of modern greatness, however glorious. And doubtless the Jews, clinging, as they did, to a belief in their own superiority, threw themselves into the spirit of the passover without misgiving, exciting themselves to a proud enjoyment of the blessings

which had been handed down to them from their forefathers. National festivities are very alluring for this very reason, that they satisfy the conscience; there seems no selfishness connected with them;—a deep and insidious selfishness may indeed lurk underneath, but it does not appear upon the surface. The better feelings of human nature are called forth by such occasions; closed hearts are opened, stony hearts are touched. We are not likely to suspect evil in ourselves or in others at a period of national joy.

And the passover must have been also a season of social and domestic rejoicing. Friends came from distant quarters; those perhaps who never met at other times, met then. There must have been interchanges of sympathies, and vivid interests awakened for the dwellers in other lands. The Jew, whose ordinary home was away from Judea, must have brought back tales of foreign countries, and new habits of thought; the minds of all would thus be enlarged; curiosity would be aroused and gratified; all this was full of enjoyment, and that of a very innocent kind.

There is no reason to suppose that the disciples of our blessed Lord were unlike other Jews in their feelings at this period. They had indeed been warned that trial was at hand, but it does not appear that they at all understood the real meaning of the warning. Their fears, if they existed, must have been but vague. Every one around them was joyous, their friends and neighbours

were happy, they themselves met with no persecution, and their Lord had even been received by the populace with acclamation. Above all He was with them still. When the day should come that the Bridegroom was to be taken away from them, then might they fast and mourn, but not yet. Whilst they could look upon Him, speak to Him, watch Him, listen to Him freely, there could be no real sorrow. And so they did their Lord's bidding, probably in quietness if not gladness of heart, and "Peter and John went to prepare the passover that they might eat."

A great contrast to all this human feeling, whether of rejoicing, or of calm trust and peace is to be found in the position of the Redeemer. Impossible though it must be to enter, even in the most remote degree, into the intensity of His misery; yet it cannot be without good effect upon our hearts to try and bring before us some faint image of what His situation really was:—desertion, agony, death before Him—a cloud of suffering encompassing Him which those who loved Him best could not even see;—a trial awaiting Him to which He could only venture distantly to allude, even though it was drawing so near. And this unutterable loneliness and horror to be borne amidst scenes of the greatest outward rejoicing, when every sight and sound spoke of human gladness, and the national degradation was lost in the memory of the glorious days of old! Our Lord was a man in all a man's sinless feelings; therefore He had the

Jewish patriotism. It was love for His country which caused the only tears recorded in Scripture, except those which were shed over the grave of Lazarus. He could never have loved it more than He did at the time of that great national meeting. And outwardly he shared the general gladness ;— He did what others did ; and gathering His disciples together, He prepared to eat the passover—with what anguish of spirit, we may scarcely venture to imagine.

There are times frequent as we go on in life, when we ourselves are called upon to share in festivity, while our hearts are oppressed with sorrow. The thought of our Lord's last passover may perhaps help us to make the effort heartily and in a right spirit. So calm, so thoughtful in preparation, so cautious in His warning of the coming evil, so tender and gentle, so sympathising and encouraging,—we, ourselves, as we read those few last chapters of the Gospels, are sometimes inclined to think more of the disciples than of their Master, —to forget His agony in their sorrow. It is a lesson which may come home to us even in our daily life, and our petty trials. We have no need to wait for an overwhelming grief in order to practise unselfish consideration and calm endurance. The opportunity is given us in some form or other continually, and there is no irreverence in putting into small trials the principle which is, through God's grace, to help us to brave those which are more severe. Rather it will bring the thought of

our Saviour home to us as nothing else can. We do not think,—it would be an impossible profanation,—that we can in any degree suffer as He did ; but we may wish to imitate Him ; for we must remember that He has said, “ Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.”

If we could only see the amount of suffering we cause others by thrusting our moody discomfort or our selfish sorrows upon them, we should probably be very much startled. We are so accustomed to think that the mere expression of our discontent or annoyance is of no consequence, that we relieve ourselves by it without a thought. We see others happy whilst we are unhappy, and we are only jarred and fretted by the sight. We say it, or if we do not say it, we show it by our looks ; and so we cast a shade of sadness over their mirth, and destroy what would otherwise have been a season of happiness. It does not strike us that we are called upon to “ rejoice with them that do rejoice,” as well as to “ weep with them that weep.” And again ; in times of real sorrow, when, as at the last passover, any great trial is impending, if we are among the chief sufferers, we consider that fact to be an excuse for the absence of self-discipline ; we expect every one to think of us, and attend to us ; we wrap ourselves up in our grief ; we make it an excuse for coldness, neglect of duties, impatience and irritability ; we say we cannot help it, because we are unhappy. It is not at all rare for grief thus to affect the temper, and irritability not

even to be called such. All this is wholly, painfully unlike the tone of mind exhibited to us in these closing hours of our Redeemer's life. And it will not do to put the thought from us; to say that the cases are so unspeakably different that no comparison can be made between them; or to think that we also, if placed in situations of overwhelming danger and anxiety, should, like others, find ourselves equal to them. We shall be judged, not by what we might have been, but what we have been. God, in mercy to our weakness, may spare us any such overwhelming trial. If He should not, we have great—the very greatest—cause to fear that we shall fail under it, unless we have been long preparing ourselves by self-discipline to meet it.

The bright smile which strives even in sorrow to show sympathy in pleasure, the cheerful word by which we add to the enjoyment of others, though we may be compelled ourselves to bear some aching of the head or weariness of the limbs, may seem very trifling; but by these means we are to train ourselves, by them we are to become like unto our Lord. How that likeness is being perfected, we may not "know now, but we shall know hereafter." We work in this life blindly; the actions which we are called upon to perform appear to have little or no connection; for the most part we know not why we do them, except that some claim of necessity or some whisper of conscience warns us not to neglect them. But this apparently confused, bewildering present,—so close to us that it shuts out all which

lies beyond it,—is not really confused. God has a meaning and a purpose in it, though we cannot discover it. The child who is learning to be an artist keeps his eye upon the picture set before him, copies each stroke, often without seeing its importance, and only when all is finished, sees that he has produced a likeness of the pattern set before him ;—and so must it be with us.

Every human being is now forming, though unconsciously, a picture of his life, which he must hereafter present before God. If we would have ours such as we shall not shrink from then offering in Christ's name, we must work at it in the same child-like spirit, copying in every minute detail the picture of holiness which Jesus has set before us, until the finishing stroke shall be put to it in the moment of death, and our picture be confided to God's keeping, never to be seen by us again till, in the Day of Resurrection, we discover that we have, unknown to ourselves, and through God's grace, caught,—though in an immeasurably faint degree,—the form, and color, and spirit of the Great Original.

THE ROMANCE OF DAILY LIFE.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 9—12.

“And they said unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we prepare? And He said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the good man of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he shall show you a large upper room furnished: there make ready.”

THERE are some people mentioned in the Gospel, yet not prominently brought forward, whom one is always inclined to envy. The “good man,” for instance, in whose house was the large upper room. The way in which he is here spoken of seems to bring our blessed Lord so near to his private everyday life; and the mere fact of the pitcher of water being carried into his house, makes us feel that, as the common ordinary domestic occupations of every day were being carried on there, the house might have been one of our own, the employments those in which we ourselves are actually engaged.

But that house, if we could see it now, could never be to us like any other; the more common might be the traces remaining of those who once for a few brief hours inhabited it, the more solemn

would be our reverence for it. The feeling is innate in us. We find it in the historical reminiscences of certain places ; in rooms set apart because princes or persons of celebrity have inhabited them,—because they have eaten, drank, and slept there ; and which are now kept precisely in the same state in which they were left ; every trifling object connected with common life still remaining untouched. Such places have a peculiar charm. We say that there is a romance about them ; but romance is after all only the searching of the human heart after the highest truth ; it has in it the germ of what is infinitely more real than what we call reality.

No one who thinks seriously and rationally can believe that we were sent into the world only to eat, and drink, to sleep and talk, and move from place to place,—and yet life is made up of these things. What we call important events are externally merely a particular arrangement of certain every-day circumstances. A great public rejoicing is, on the surface, only a number of people meeting together, and showing their joy by an excess of the same actions which they perform every day. A great national calamity is only that many people suffer instead of a few. Government is but the making and putting into execution of laws which are to affect us in our ordinary dealings with each other ; and yet a person who would say that there is nothing grand and exhilarating in a day of general festivity ; that a national calamity was not

awful; or that the government of a country is not a matter of the very highest importance, would be called senseless, if not wicked.

It is the spirit, the deep under-lying meaning, the romance, in fact, of these things, which gives them their dignity and their importance. That which we see, and hear, and touch, is the mere outward covering; the treasure lies within. And if this be so, it would surely be well to inquire whether God does not intend us to foster the same spirit in our daily life.

The pitcher of water and the upper room in the good man's house could not have been so carefully noted without some cause; and the good man himself,—so humble and unknown, yet so highly favoured,—he must have been mentioned for some reason. There must be thousands like him, and we ourselves may be living just the same kind of life; our homes may be just as little remarkable, only to be distinguished by the circumstance of seeing some one enter in. Are they so entirely without association or romance? are they really nothing but a shelter for the body—places in which we employ ourselves in providing for the wants of our physical existence? If they are, there must be something wrong in them, or rather in us. We cannot have made a right use of the feelings implanted in us by nature.

For our Lord has revealed to us the reality of all which we call romance and imagination. He has told us, and he reminds us again and again, that in our retired homes, and in our most private

life, He is ever present with us; that when we lie down and when we rise up—at our meals, in our daily business, or our common amusements, He is close to us; that He shares every grief, and hallows every innocent joy. Far more than this, He reveals to us that, by His Spirit, He dwells in our very hearts—guiding, and guarding, and strengthening them. If we wish for associations to ennoble our daily existence, where else shall we find them? If the good man of the house may probably have set apart that upper room because it had been honoured by the presence of the Saviour, how can we look upon our homes with indifference, when in them we have knelt in His immediate Presence, and experienced the comfort of His strengthening grace? They are not, indeed, churches, that is, they are not so consecrated as to be unfit for common use, but they are churches in a sense which is very true, and ought to be very elevating and cheering to us. We speak of the spirit of a family, the tone of a household. If it be a holy spirit, a religious tone, it is because the true romance of association pervades it—because Christ is acknowledged as present in it—because the work done in it is His work, the meals are His meals, the amusements are His gift; because there is nothing little in it—nothing trifling, or mean, or unimportant; because each word and action is connected more or less with some thought of Him, and is known to contain within it the seed that is to bear fruit for Eternity. One day spent with this conviction

present to us, would be spent so near to Heaven that earth itself would be almost paradise.

And God has placed within our reach the means of retaining such a conviction, by giving us powers of imagination and association. They may often have been misused, but they are still precious gifts. Every time we connect sacred thoughts with a common action, we do somewhat towards enabling ourselves to comprehend the great truth of our existence in and for God. St. Paul has given us advice upon this subject, which we must all have heard, though, perhaps, not all have considered; "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." When we have learned to follow this command we shall have learned to "walk by faith and not by sight;" and this fallen world, its cares, hopes, business, pleasures, its pomps and its poverty, will be to us but an outward shell, important only as containing within it the germ of a heavenly life, and soon about to fall away, and leave the spirit trained for Heaven, free to enter upon its enjoyment.

When we have learned it! There lies the difficulty. The lesson is long: years are required to make it perfect. And it is difficult: none but God can teach it.

Perhaps, we say, the habit of association may be begun to-morrow;—but to-morrow may never be ours.

Shall it not rather be to-day—at this hour—at this minute—in the very next action we perform when we lay down our book?

MEMORY.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 13.

“And they went, and found as He had said unto them : and they made ready the passover.”

THE example of our Lord's life would have been very different in its influence if it had been, like that of John the Baptist, in the wilderness, away from men ; but perhaps we seldom bring before our minds how very much it resembled our own. The preparation of the passover by the disciples must have been so entirely what we see and take part in every day. How often do we prepare for a certain hour and then sit down ! So did our Redeemer and his disciples. Infinite consequences indeed were depending on that feast ; yet so it may be with ours ; so indeed it must be. Infinite consequences are depending upon every meal, every word, even every thought. Angels must indeed marvel whilst they watch the pendulum of each man's life vibrating between heaven and hell, when they hear us speak of our earthly existence as having no interest ! The complaint is most frequently made by persons in the middle of life, when the excitement of youth is past. There is nothing to do ; no occupation to

care for, so we sometimes hear it said; and certainly if this world were all, it would be perfectly true. The young man's eager ambition and passionate hopes and fears, however they may engross him now, will at length fail to give him interest, and must sink into the weary round of barren employments or amusements, which the man of middle age pursues, merely because he has become accustomed to them. There is nothing to do, and no occupation to care for, unless perhaps we set ourselves to alleviate suffering, a task most disappointing, and in many ways beyond the power of the greater number of persons.

A story has been related of a French cabman who destroyed himself, leaving a memorandum behind him, that he did so because he could not see the use of driving a carriage every day, at the same hour, to the same places. The unhappy man must have been an infidel, and according to his principles, he reasoned and acted consistently. And we,—if we look upon life in the same way, are each, more or less, infidels likewise. We do not believe in that which we do not see. We are blinded by the present moment, the actions we are every day forced to attend to;—actions which yet, it may be well to remember, are, most probably, the chief things which, through God's mercy, keep us all from insanity; because they hide from us not the want of interest in life, but its awful, overwhelming, unutterable interest. If we were left face to face with our true position, and saw ourselves struggling

with a foe, only inferior to Him who is Almighty ; the past irrevocable, the grave before us, after the grave Eternity, and we ourselves rushing towards it more swiftly than the succession of thought,—human strength, human intellect, must sink, crushed and paralysed. One glance, it may be, would do the work. That we are compelled to rise in the morning, to dress, to eat, to labour ; that we guard against hunger and cold ; that we are to provide ourselves with money ; that we are obliged to watch against illness—all these things are so many mental safeguards. Our task is to take heed that they be not converted into snares.

There are times when the circumstances of God's Providence force us to turn aside for a while from this ordinary life. In the presence of death the eye becomes strangely clear. Life is then seen and read in its true importance. Persons who look on think there is something strange and unnatural in the feelings of those whose home is for a few days the home of the dead. Such a state of mind, they say, cannot last. Quite true ; it cannot ; because human nature, in its weakness, could not bear it ; but it is not the less a glimpse beyond the veil into the depths of the great reality. And though the feeling cannot last, the remembrance may and ought to do so. What we then thought, what we desired, the judgments we formed—those are the true thoughts, the right desires, the perfect judgments. And, without waiting for such direct calls from the warnings of God, we may, in a

quieter spirit, take advantage of the seasons which are appointed for self-recollection to endeavour to bring them before us.

Memory is a great help to us. What is past is, in a certain sense, dead. To look upon it is, in a manner, to bring ourselves into the presence of death. Inclination, indolence, excitement, personal comfort, or discomfort, have vanished—only the spirit, the truth of existence, remains. And so it is that every man's life, however outwardly uneventful, is full of importance the moment he looks back upon it, for it becomes to him a history, and he is able to see it in its true light, its relation to Eternity. God only knows what we shall have to answer for in the misuse and neglect of that wonderful power of memory by which we are enabled thus to form a true estimate of our lives.

A power has been given us of condensing successive periods of time into one; of extracting, as it were, the essence from them: and we say that our childhood was thoughtless, or passionate, or frivolous, or indolent; that our youth was worldly, that certain seasons have been seasons of repentance or of earnestness. Perhaps we ask what it is which enables us thus to put aside all the external forms, and seize upon the spirit of our existence? That spirit did not lie hidden in any one action, or in two, or ten, or twenty; it was mixed up with innumerable other motives and feelings; it was often disturbed and interrupted, probably for a while quite overlooked, and even lost. How, then, is it

found? The answer is beyond us, hidden in the fact of our immortality, and the mystery of that being which was formed in the Image of God. All which affects our conscience is, so it would seem, indestructible, because it springs from the knowledge of good and evil, which is part of the Divine nature; but the instrument by which we thus attain to a connected view of the past—by which we trace the thread running through our whole lives—is Memory. To make a right use of it, we should treasure up in our hearts, and by degrees gather together those flashes of recollection which come across us—we know not why—and make us marvel why slight events should be thus remembered, whilst large portions of our lives are for the time forgotten. In them we shall probably find the germ of our present character. They touched our conscience and our heart, and, therefore, they still live. And by them we shall discover how abiding principles, whether of good or evil, were to be found in impressions,—habits, of which at the time we could not see the importance;—how firm convictions took their rise amidst scenes of petty annoyance and trifling conflicts of will, and gathered strength through the same apparent opposition;—how, in fact, circumstances which passed so rapidly as to be almost unnoticed at the time, were in reality stamping upon our hearts an impress which was to last for ever.

Awful but salutary must such a retrospect be whether awakening gratitude or repentance, and

giving,—so we may surely trust,—a depth of earnestness to our work at the present moment, which will admit of no frivolity, no procrastination, no lukewarmness: which will make business elevating, and hallow amusement as the means by which we are to gain refreshment for labour; which will convert weariness into patience, and dulness and monotony into resignation and hope; which will make us live with one thought ever present to us—that to-morrow, to-day will have become yesterday.

The disciples prepared the Passover for their Lord;—when the hour was come they sat down with Him.

With what feelings of awe and thankfulness must they have thought upon those simple actions if they looked back upon them, whilst gathered at the foot of the Cross!

THE DESIRE OF CHRIST.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 15.

“ And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you, before I suffer.”

OUR Blessed Redeemer's expression, “ With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you,” is certainly very remarkable, even to our dull perception of the vast reality and importance of all He said and did. What He could so desire must have been of such incalculable value! It would seem as though all the benefits of the Holy Communion which He was about to institute were pressing,—if one may venture so to speak, —upon His mind, and therefore He longed to impart them. To dwell upon the words seems to assist us in understanding more what that blessing may be; understand it *fully*, of course, we never can; certainly not on earth, perhaps not even in Heaven. Yet where there is real earnestness, nothing in our religious life grows more than the estimation of the Holy Communion. Whatever instruction and assistance may be given, it must at first be received ignorantly, especially by very young people. Even the meaning of common every-day events is far more important than they can understand; and how much

more must that be the case in a mystery which doubtless, even the angels desire to look into! But where earnestness and sincerity, and simple faith exist, there will always be found God's blessing; and with His blessing deeper knowledge and clearer spiritual perceptions must come.

This is a subject on which no reasoning will help us. Reason takes up the root of the plant to see how it grows, and by the very inquiry destroys life. Only we may, perhaps, gain some good to ourselves by thinking not so much upon the mysterious nature of the Holy Communion as upon the place it has always held in the scheme of Christianity. That which for eighteen hundred years has been the centre of thought, discussion, argument, devotion, must have in it some deep value, even in the eyes of its opponents. Men do not violently assail what they esteem trifling. There must be a wonderful power and truth in an institution which has come down to us through those long centuries; which has survived the corruptions of Rome and the faithlessness of Puritanism; the awfulness of which men feel though they cannot reason upon it; and to which they cling, though so often blindly and doubtfully; explaining away their own words of belief, but conscious through all that there is a truth in them deeper than they can understand,—that there is a blessing in the Communion, even though they are tempted to deny it.

But these are human feelings and human testi-

monies; something infinitely beyond them is to be found in our Lord's words: "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover." It may possibly be said that they do not apply to the institution of the Communion. If persons think so, it is not a question for argument, and they must be left to their own opinion; but, taking the expression in its simple and most obvious sense, and connecting it,—as we have reason to do,—with the action which followed, we shall scarcely doubt that the desire felt by our Saviour had reference to the blessing which He was about to grant to the disciples,—the spiritual feast which was to take the place of the typical commemoration.

And this would at once create an immense distinction between the Communion and any mere ceremony. If the feeling of the communicant in the act of partaking was to be the one object of importance, our Lord might have desired for His disciples humility, faith, earnestness, every Christian virtue; He might have prayed for them and with them; but the rite itself would have been of secondary consequence. The feelings required then might have been equally called forth at other times, and the blessing would have been equal. But this is evidently not all. Had that last passover not been eaten, Christ might have endured His agony in Gethsemane, and died on Calvary; He might have risen on Easter morning, and sent His Spirit upon His disciples on the Day of Pentecost, but something would yet have been

wanting—a blessing would still have been withheld. If it were not so, why should his thoughts have lingered so lovingly on that one feast? why, at the very moment when torture and death were drawing near,—so near that it would seem as though the first agonizing thrill of mortal agony must even then have been present to Him,—did he turn from them with but one longing desire, that He might eat that passover with His disciples before He suffered?

What He,—our Saviour, our Redeemer, our God,—longed for! What we think of coldly, turn from with indifference, receive with lukewarmness, forget when it is over!

They are sad thoughts which arise in the mind when we look back upon our past Communion; none, perhaps, are more sad, except that they are so mingled with hopes of mercy. Doubtless the blessing is bestowed according to the preparation made: “To him that hath shall more be given;” yet is it a blessing distinct from the preparation, and in its least form unutterably beyond all our expectations. It may be that if we are permitted in Heaven to look back upon our course upon earth, one of the most startling and overwhelming discoveries will be the value of God’s gifts, conferred upon us in return for our least degree of earnestness;—the blessing of the Holy Communion, in answer to the feeble prayer, the weak resolution, the cold act of obedience! That will be one view. There will be another,—not,

perhaps, ours in Heaven, for it might bring sorrow into that Home of Glory, but unquestionably ours in the Judgment Day, when, saved though we may be, we shall be compelled to look upon the fact that we might have been lost. That view will be the prospect of the holiness to which we might have attained, if we had only used to the utmost the means placed within our reach. Month after month, if not Sunday after Sunday, the gift, which, to our Redeemer, was so unspeakably precious, that the desire to impart it hid for a while the prospect of death, offered to us, and perhaps rejected! If not rejected, how received?

Could we count up the Communionss at which we have been present, or at which we might have been present,—were it given us, with our finite comprehension, to measure the vastness of the blessing put before us, and see to what heights of holiness it would, through God's mercy upon our own earnestness and faith in preparation, have lifted us, surely we should sink to the earth with bitter, life-enduring regret. The lowest place in heaven will be an infinite happiness;—perhaps we think we should be contented with it. We forget that to be *contented now* with that prospect, to make the *least* instead of the greatest efforts in our power, to sit down indolently, receiving the offer of God's gift with indifference, or thrusting ourselves into His presence to receive them without preparation, is, in fact, to own that we set a higher value upon earth than Heaven, and, therefore, to risk the loss of Heaven.

The desire which Christ felt for that last pass-over will rise up in judgment against us, if we partake of it without desire, at least without the prayer that we may desire it. Our whole earnestness, our whole heart, that is what we must bring always; it may be in the form of thankfulness, or repentance, or trembling fear; it may be only the germ of that deep longing, that infinite satisfaction which, as years go on, the Holy Communion will bestow; but, as a child is fully a human being, although as yet undeveloped, so must our faith, and love, and devotion be in their measure full and entire, though as yet far from maturity. To be content with anything short of this is a mockery. Christ gave His whole longing desire to us,—He will expect nothing less in return.

To think of Him standing, as we may believe, at His altar, watching those for whom He died passing out from His presence, to know that He still longs, that He still “with desire desires to eat the passover” with us, and then to turn away! It cannot be possible.

Still less would it seem possible for those who have once knelt there before Him, who have once felt His Presence, and known, even in the most remote degree, what Communion with Him means, ever again so to approach Him without that earnest, full desire to be His in body and soul—His for Eternity, which is the blessing bestowed—how, in what way, He only knows—in the Holy Communion.

WORK FOR TIME.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 16.

“For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

How very carelessly we are accustomed to read words which have Infinity and Eternity in their meaning! “Till it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.” Then it will be fulfilled,—what, or how, who can say? But we are travelling on towards the fulfilment. In the midst of our daily tasks we are flying towards it more swiftly than thought, or anything that is in Time, for it is Time itself which bears us onwards. Yet who considers this? Most of us are like travellers on a railway, amusing ourselves with books, and work, and conversation; forgetting that the moment must come, and is rapidly nearing, when the journey’s end must be reached. The man of thought makes use of his time in a railway: he does, indeed, outwardly, what others do; he may read, or talk, or sit silent; but all has a reference to the end. The man of no thought feels that he has a certain wearisome time to pass, and his only care is how to render it less irksome. There is the same difference to be remarked amongst men with regard to the journey of life,—with this

distinction, however : the railway journey has but one end, or rather object, and no one can be mistaken in it ; the journey in itself is nothing to any one ; whether it be quick or slow, smooth or wearisome, is only of importance either as regards present comfort, or the business to be transacted when it is ended. But it is not so with life. If one portion of the world is occupied in seeking present gratification, if another is seeking to use Time so as to secure Eternity, there is a third portion—probably much the most numerous—whose object is something to be attained in the actual journey ; something future,—something, it may be, right in itself, honourable, good, useful,—but in this life. The fulfilment of their hopes is not to be in the Kingdom of God, but in the kingdom of man.

And here, perhaps, may lie one of the great temptations of the present age. We are all eagerly hurrying after work,—usefulness. We have been awakened from a long trance of indolence, during which innumerable evils have sprung up around us, growing with hateful luxuriance, and threatening to sow the seeds of still more terrible sin and suffering. We all see this ; we discuss, and plan, and act. Innumerable panaceas for innumerable social ills are suggested and tried. Whilst we lament our shortcomings, we are still in our hearts satisfied, even because we are not satisfied. We would rather live in this age than in any previous century, because there is so much life in it, so much battling with imperfection, so much striving after

perfection. Probably we are right. Solomon cautions us against the spirit of regret for the past, warning us that we are not to ask, "Why the former days were better than these?" and implying, therefore, that they are not better. But Solomon tells us also, that "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all."

"Time and chance;" the hour of death after the accidents of life! We labour as though we forgot them. In the greatness of our work, we overlook our own littleness; but we also overlook our own immortality. That which will, through the merits of our Redeemer, admit us to be present at the glorious fulfilment of all promises, the completion of all blessedness—in the Kingdom of God, will not be the good we have done to others, but the struggle we have had with ourselves. The attainment of the image of Christ in our own character,—this must be our object! Persons may exclaim against us for declaring it to be so; they may call us narrow-minded and selfish; but there can be no question, to those who consider the subject deeply, that it is the neglect of this object,—the fact that we put the fulfilment of our work in this life before the preparation for the fulfilment of Heaven,—which does actually injure, endanger, and too often utterly destroy the very object we have at heart.

Let any one read history thoughtfully, and he

will see that the greatest events that have happened,—those the influence of which has been most widely spread,—have been determined by the passions and follies of the persons who took part in them. The fact is so evident that we all from past experience calculate upon it beforehand in our dealings with each other; we only overlook it in ourselves! Some wise plan, for instance, may be formed, but we know that we cannot fully carry it out because one man is proud, or another is indolent, or a third is vacillating; and we take these facts into account, and speak and act accordingly. Yet something is in the end done—some good is effected; our united work sinks into the history of the past,—it becomes a thing, an event. The body remains with man; and man bestows his meed of approbation. But the soul has fled. Rather let us say, the work had many souls, and they have gone to carry before God not the history of their success or their failure in the object for which they strove, but the account of the conflict with the deep evil in their own hearts, brought into action by the very labour in which they were engaged, and either conquered or submitted to.

Looking back upon life sincerely, this truth would seem to be impressed upon us by our own consciousness. Just for a moment, it may be rather flattering to our vanity to be reminded of what we have *done*; but the very imperfection of memory prevents us from seeing it in any but a shadowy form. What we have *done* and what we *are* is

the abiding fact,—ever present, never dying. And there is a terrible, an awful danger in any work—let it be never so pure, charitable, or seemingly disinterested—when it tends to hide from us that truth. What we *do* must be for time; it must have its fulfilment in this world. “When the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment,” then shall “they that dwell therein,”—their hopes, interests, objects, cares,—“die in like manner.”

How many, many times, we have heard this said! How like a wearisome oft-told tale it sounds! Yet it might do us no harm to ask ourselves, looking back only upon one day, how much of its work has been done with the definite recognition that it is of no value as regards ourselves, unless our object in it has been such as will be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. Not that the thought can always be actually present to us, or that we could carry on our daily employment if it were; but there are two kinds of recollection, one of which may perhaps be called positive, the other negative. Christ and Eternity, Heaven and Hell, are positively present to us when we fix our attention in prayer, or study the Bible, or make some definite effort to do that which our conscience tells us God will require us. But they are also present to us when, in the busy hours of worldly occupation, an evil thought is suggested to us, and almost unconsciously, yet from long habit, we check it. They are present when we keep watch over hasty words, when we guard

against selfish interests, when, in fact, we struggle in any way, with the evil which is working in us. And this struggle may and ought to be perpetual. When we are so absorbed in our work, whatever may be its aim or importance, as to forget this, our object ceases to be the fulfilment of all things in the Kingdom of God, it becomes work for the kingdom of man.

There are many sad sights in this fallen world, perhaps none more so than the spectacle of a man beginning a great work, earnestly, religiously and humbly, and becoming so engrossed in it, that unconsciously to himself his object in it is changed, and it has ceased to be labor for God, and has become labor for himself. It is a snare which we may all fall into, more or less. Yet God has mercifully given us innumerable warnings and safeguards. One is the power of retracing the past, and seeing its swiftness and the nothingness of the earthly interests once connected with it.

How distant to a child is the prospect of being eighteen or twenty years of age! It is a time which it seems scarcely possible can ever arrive; distant as the moon, the sun, or even the fixed stars. But eighteen comes, it is numbered with the days gone by—the next point is nearer, sooner reached—we are in middle age before we have forgotten youth; in old age before we have buried the cares of middle age. After old age comes death—after death the time when “all these things shall be fulfilled.”

It is fearfully near if we could but realise it.—To look back then and read life—what will it be?

EXCLUSIVENESS.

ST. LUKE, xxii, 17, 18.

“And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves : for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.”

THIS cup, which formed part of the ordinary ceremonial of the Passover, has been thought by some to be typical of the cup afterwards to be given by Christ in the Holy Communion. Its exact meaning, seems, however, to be doubtful ; but it is to be remarked how careful our Blessed Redeemer is to attend to every custom recognised by the Jew, and how solemn and important each action becomes when consecrated by Him. “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God shall come”—so did He carry on the thoughts of the disciples to the same fulfilment of all things to which he had before alluded,—impressing upon them again, as though in pity to the human weakness which was about to pass through such a severe trial, the certainty of that glorious hereafter which he saw, though from them it was hidden.

It will not, one may trust, be wrong to think of the cup, given to the disciples to divide amongst themselves, as in some way representing the earthly

blessings entrusted to us, which we are called upon to share with others; as the cup, given afterwards in the Eucharist, is undoubtedly the highest heavenly blessing conferred by God individually upon each. Few of us think as we ought of the duty of dividing blessings,—all blessings, great joys and small pleasures. We are ready to crave sympathy in our vexations, but our pleasures are too often hidden even from ourselves, much less shared with others. The assertion may appear bold, yet if we watch ourselves through the course of any one day we shall in all probability feel that it is true. Sunshine, warmth, pleasant companionship, rest after fatigue, books, music, beauty of every kind, give us pleasure; but how often during the day do we cheer the hearts of those with whom we live, by speaking of them? And how different would many homes be if, instead of the complaints made at passing annoyances, there were expressions of satisfaction at passing gratifications? If one person's discontent can mar the happiness of a whole household, so will one person's cheerful thankfulness spread through it a glow of enjoyment.

This is one way of sharing our blessings,—perhaps less seldom practised than any other. There is another and a more obvious one,—but it is not natural to us as a nation. We call ourselves exclusive, and rather pride ourselves upon it,—for national faults bring no shame with them. But the fault of a nation is made up of the faults of

individuals, and when exclusiveness is practised by individuals it loses its dignity, and is seen in its true character,—its meanness and selfishness.

God is not exclusive; the words are used in all reverence. If He were, He would have dwelt in the ineffable blissfulness of his own Being, and neither angel nor man would ever have been created. But when the Heavens and the Earth were made, “the morning-stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy,”—and since that hour one unceasing interchange of blessing and of praise has been continued between the Creator and the creatures of His hand. O, “Praise ye the Lord from the Heavens,—praise Him in the heights,—praise ye Him all His angels,—praise ye Him all His hosts.” Dragons and deeps, fire and hail, snow and vapour, mountains and hills, beasts and cattle, creeping things and flying fowl, all are to praise Him, because all are the works or the objects of His bounty.

But it is not so with us. Many things there are of which the whole value to us consists in the fact that they are possessions which none but ourselves can own. Let an object be rare, and it is sought after, for no other reason; let a pleasure be confined to a few, and instantly it becomes important to share it; and knowing this, when we wish to arouse envy or to excite admiration, we are apt to take the simplest and easiest method by becoming exclusive. We do so in trifling instances—in cases which would arouse shame if they were brought

before us in their exceeding pettiness. The loveliness of flowers is given by God to all, to the beggar as well as to the prince; but the pleasure of some in the beauty of a plant would be destroyed if they saw it in a cottager's window. We delight in books and pictures, but there are those who care for them only as treasures which the world is not allowed to look upon. Many of us even value our fellow-creatures by the extent to which they carry this pettiness. If a man shuts himself up in an exclusive circle he is courted and honoured; if he is free and accessible to all he is thought little of.

Probably few think there is much harm in this, it is so common, and it does not at all interfere with a person's being very affectionate to his peculiar friends, or even generally kind-hearted in cases which do not touch upon his especial exclusiveness. And it is so entirely a feeling belonging to this world, that we look at it as something apart from Christian principle. We feel that it is our nature; possibly an infirmity, but not one which we are required to struggle against, any more than we are called upon to contend with some bodily weakness, or peculiarity of taste, which we believe will no longer be ours in a higher state of existence. Or we say, and very truly, that we cannot be friends with all the world; that the very laws of society would not permit us to throw everything we possess open to the enjoyment of all; that there must be different circles, and that

no one will in the end be happier for the endeavour to blend them. It is all so plausible, and every case which is brought forward may have so much in its favour, that it is dangerous to rest the merits of the question upon any one instance of exclusiveness. The question we have to put to ourselves is, whether it is our effort not to be exclusive; whether when we have an opening for giving pleasure, we consider not how few but how many we can enable to be partakers of it; whether it is our real wish that others should share that which we delight in? If we have the principle, the application will be easy enough; if we have it not, we may very readily find excuses to satisfy us now. Whether they will do so when we are called upon to answer before God for the use we have made of our every-day blessings as well as our highest advantages, is another and a very serious question.

But there is a thought which may perhaps touch us all. Once, upon this sinful earth, He dwelt who owned the glory of Heaven. Beauty of every kind, beyond all that the most exalted imagination can picture; music, sweet as the angel voices which lingered on the ear of Eve when she turned her steps from Paradise; society complete in its blessedness and perfect in its love; all were His, all awaiting Him when the conflict should be past and the victory gained. But one joy was wanting,—and when the thoughts of the Saviour of the world were carried for a few moments, from the prospect of mortal agony to the

bliss prepared for Him beyond, His last prayer for the sinners whom He was about to redeem was, that they might be with Him and share His glory.

Which of us, with the remembrance of that prayer treasured in our hearts, could bear to shut up unnecessarily any,—even the smallest pleasure,—from the enjoyment of another.

THE REMEMBRANCE OF CHRIST.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 19, 20.

“And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My Body which is given for you : this do in remembrance of Me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in My Blood, which is shed for you.”

“THIS do in remembrance of Me.” There are few words probably which come home to us more than these. In their most direct meaning, they attract persons who would not be able to acknowledge, who perhaps would even shrink from, the whole truth. It seems as though they must have kept up the *feeling* for the Sacrament in years past, when the mystery was well nigh overlooked. Certainly they are intensely human, appealing to the affections and sympathies which we all have, and all cherish. We might almost think that they were spoken in special condescension to the infirmity of the Apostles, and through them to ours. They come first, as though to seize upon the heart by means of its softer impulses, and so to prepare the way for the doctrine which follows: “This cup is the New Testament in My Blood which is shed for many.” That declaration, when first announced, would have been

inexplicable to the Apostles. It is in a great measure inexplicable to us now—touching upon the existence of sin, and the necessity of an atonement,—facts, which have been and ever will be a mystery to us whilst we remain on earth, and which, we are told, are a mystery to the angels in Heaven. But the foreshadowing of death; “This do in remembrance of Me,” appeals to feelings which are amongst the most sacred, as they are the most universal, in human nature.

The longing not to be forgotten is apparently an instinct of our immortality. Even those who would profess themselves sceptical as to the very fact of a future existence, prove their faith in it by the way in which they cling to the hope that their remembrance will not be permitted to perish. The last thought of the dying is, to leave some relic or gift, which shall recall their existence; the last promise made to them is that their names shall be cherished in the heart, even though it may never pass the lips. And as we go on in life we must all feel that this promise bears its necessary fulfilment. We do not and cannot forget. Deep down—hidden from mortal eye,—perhaps, only regarded by ourselves from time to time, as we pause to take breath in the rush of the world’s business,—the friends whom we have loved live still, each in his sacred, separate home; and as time creeps on and the hour of reunion approaches, the dim forms become more visible, the outlines more distinct. The days gone by, and the beings who peopled them, as-

sume again a vivid reality; and at length age lives with the past, and forgets the present, for it feels that in a few more years,—days,—perhaps in a few hours,—the past will again be restored to it.

So it must be with us all if God should spare us to become old. The treasures hidden in our hearts must increase as those which are external to us decrease. But what if amongst them Christ is not to be found? What if we have stored up earthly memories, and human affections, but have left no room for the most sacred of all memories, the dearest of all affections? Our Lord knows whether it is so. He knew it, when He gave utterance to that last command: "This do in remembrance of Me." As He sat at meat that night with His disciples, His eye saw onwards into time—the centuries which to us are mysteries gone by—the age which in its present engrossing interest swallows up all that has been before it. He knew the frivolous pleasures, the fretting cares, and the absorbing pursuits which crowd upon our minds, filling our hearts, and laying claim to our devotion. He saw each one of us individually, standing apart from all others, as a being for whom He had lived, and worked, and joyed, and sorrowed—as an immortal soul—loved with the love of Deity, and to be purchased for Himself by the agony which awaited Him in the Garden, and the Blood which was to be shed upon the Cross.

And then it was that the sinless self-recollection awoke, and the yearnings of His heart went

forth in that one command: "This do in remembrance of Me."

"Yes, to remember Him! nothing more. Not to be thankful, not to be obedient, not to honour, or reverence, or worship, but only—to remember Him! The poorest beggar lying on his bed of straw, and awaiting the approach of death, could not have asked for less.

Surely that one request can never be heard unmoved! Cold though we may be, weak, tempted, burdened with care and guilt, it cannot be listened to with indifference. If we can scarcely collect our thoughts to pray to Him, if we cannot feel His presence, if we can find in ourselves no strength to resolve against that which displeases Him; yet at least we can remember Him. Most especially can we do so in the Holy Communion. Then, too often, even in the act of receiving that which we know to be the highest gift now vouchsafed to us, we find our hearts so dead, our perceptions so dulled, that we can perceive nothing beyond the outward symbols and the external forms which are prescribed to us. The mystery vanishes. We are not spiritual ourselves, and we cannot embrace spiritual truths; but even then there is a human thought which it is permitted us to entertain. We may deal with ourselves as with children. What they are unfitted to comprehend, we do not attempt to explain to them; we give them the portion of truth which suits their undeveloped capacity. And so with ourselves. It may seem

impossible to grasp the hidden meaning and blessing of the act in which we are called upon to join ; but we may suffer our thoughts to rest upon it in that point of view which comes home to us at all moments.

The Holy Communion was instituted as a memorial to recall to us One who suffered for us an agonizing death, and in the prospect of that death asked us to remember Him.

And with the remembrance what a train of thoughts must come !. Sufficient at once to draw aside the veil from earth, and to place us in the presence of Him, whom to remember is to love, and to love is to dwell with forever !

Many must have known such thoughts at times ; for a moment, if for no longer. Only let the remembrance of our Saviour cross our minds vividly, and the whole world is changed to us. Life is no longer dreary, earth has lost its cares, anxiety has no power to harass us, the smallest duty becomes interesting, the most passing intercourse of vital importance. What the world is to those who, for the first time, have discovered that their hearts are one,—not only the world but the universe,—not only life but Eternity, is to those who, in love, remember their Saviour.

True, the feeling is transient ; the next moment it may be gone ; but the fact that we have once known it is the earnest that, if we will, it shall be ours for ever. For it is the foretaste of infinite happiness ; the pledge, and more than the pledge,

of the blessedness which awaits us in Heaven ; and the very power of feeling it is the assurance of its reality. A woman's capacity for a mother's love is the evidence that God willed her to have an object on which to expend her love. That man can love God is the evidence that he one day shall do so.

Perhaps, though, we may say we have never felt this love, and therefore we have no such prophecy within ourselves. That cannot be. It is in our nature. Every woman has within her the capability of maternal love, though it may never have been drawn forth ; and every human being has within him the capability of heavenly love. If it were not so, he would be a demon. But the seed sown requires to be cherished and nurtured. And here lies our difficulty. Some, indeed, say that love, being a matter of feeling, is *entirely* out of our own power ; that we must act, and leave the feeling to itself : whilst others attempt actually to create the affection by enthusiastic language, and overstrained appeals to their own hearts, and to those of others. Our Lord says, "This do in remembrance of Me ;" and the act and the thought conjoined create the feeling.

There are many opportunities afforded us of making trial upon this point. Other things may be done in remembrance of Christ besides the one solemn act to which His memory is inseparably attached. Eating and drinking, lying down and rising up, trifling occupations, even innocent

amusements, may all, if we choose, be connected with some thought of our Saviour. There is one act which we do every day, which is already solemnised by a form of prayer and thanksgiving,—a remembrance of Christ. With too many it has, indeed, passed into a mere form ; yet it bears a singular resemblance to the rite in which we are specially bound to remember Him. What if, instead of sitting down to dinner carelessly, listening to a hasty grace, and almost before it is ended, turning to some other topic, as though half ashamed of what we had done, we were really to make an effort to think that Christ was present, and that we were thanking Him? Our meals would not be the less pleasant in consequence ; our cheerfulness would not be the less real because we felt that He, whose love surpasses all love, was with us, watching us, and, if one may venture so to say, taking pleasure in our enjoyment.

Or what if we fixed upon some little act of self-denial, some struggle against a daily temptation, and determined that it should be entered upon not merely from cold duty, but with a special desire to please Him, to show that we remembered Him? The difficulty would not be increased by such a thought—rather, if it could once be heartily entertained, it would make the most wearisome struggle, the most painful conflict, a glory and a triumph.

Christians we all are in name, but Christians we

shall never be in full reality until the remembrance of our Saviour is so associated with every action of our lives, as to be with us like the air we breathe, quickening and refreshing us, and becoming so much a part of ourselves, that when it is taken from us we feel that we shall sicken and die.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 21, 22.

‘ But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table. And truly the Son of Man goeth as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed.’

WHEN we compel ourselves to think seriously and deeply, we must own that there can scarcely be any warning more awful than that contained in our Lord’s declaration, “The hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table.” It comes home to us so directly, recalling the sins that force themselves into the immediate presence of God, especially sinful thoughts, and wishes, and negligences, at the Holy Communion. They may be repelled and struggled against, and we may hope that they will not be reckoned against us; and some we may trust are from without—direct temptations of Satan; but others there are assuredly from within,—consequences of former transgressions, if not offences of the moment—and which must, therefore, be part of that enmity to God, that love of evil, which betrayed our Lord; which sat at His table, and received the bread, and drank of the cup, even as others, and then went out to

deliver Him up to His enemies. We are terribly blind to the guilt of sin, even in its lightest form. It may be that the full perception of its enormity,—the full sight of evil,—like the sight of infinite perfection, would be death. And so, in the same way, we are all blind to the consequences of sin. There is nothing which it is so difficult to teach a child, nothing which we are ourselves more slow in learning; very many of us, indeed, never do learn it. We find ourselves slaves to evil habits, entangled in difficult circumstances;—life, from some unknown cause, has become an inextricable problem,—but we seldom think of asking from whence the confusion has arisen. We talk of unfortunate circumstances, and perhaps, when forced to look at the truth, we allow that we have committed some error of judgment, but we never calmly sit down and face the difficulty, and put the question to our own hearts. Yet there alone the answer must almost invariably be found. God does not create evil; it exists, and He bids us battle with it; if instead of battling we yield to it, the confusion and suffering which follow are our own, not His.

And so it is with the sin which at the present moment may be our torment. Temptation was permitted that we might strive against it; if we have yielded, and find ourselves thenceforth weak, the guilt and the suffering are our own. Let any of us think what we might have been if from childhood we had followed every good impulse, and obeyed every wise command given us by those set

over us. We should not have been perfect,—perfection is not in our nature;—sin would have overtaken, and surprised, and conquered us, but it would have been the sin of infirmity, not of wilfulness. And it is the sin of wilfulness which bears its bitter fruit to the end of life. The sin of infirmity is for the most part, through God's mercy, passed over. Yet there again we may and do mistake. The sin of infirmity becomes wilful when it is indulged. The moment that we are aware of it, if we do not guard against it, we are responsible for it. This is especially to be remembered when we comfort ourselves by thinking that certain infirmities of disposition are natural to us, and therefore excusable. They were natural at the beginning; they would not be natural now if we had always striven against them. We have an irritable temper perhaps, we were born with it; but how often in childhood and youth did we set ourselves seriously to conquer it? How often have we made excuses to ourselves for it? We are haunted by evil or irreverent thoughts; they come to us now before we are aware of them, but when they first claimed admittance, in years gone by, who opened the door to them, and cherished and dwelt upon them? Habits of negligence have become so much a part of ourselves, that we give up as hopeless the effort to overcome them; but who first indulged them? Who turned a deaf ear to the wishes of parents, and the warning of friends, and went on wilfully

in carelessness, making excuses which were known at the moment to be frivolous and unreal?

These are very sad thoughts for those who are advanced in life. They would be overpowering, if repentance were not permitted, for Christ's sake, to throw a veil over the past; and if faith did not bid us rise and look with courage to the future. But for the young they are not so much sad as spirit-stirring, from their vast importance, and the power they possess of acting upon them. "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." If Judas had quenched the first thought of covetousness which awoke in his breast, his hand would never have been the hand of the traitor who sat with Christ at His table, and then went forth to betray Him. The full crime was the completion of the sin, which in its beginning was but a feeling.

And there are crimes—God only knows how many and how great—which seem to us the result of some monstrous depravity, and which can be traced outwardly to some overpowering and unfortunate conjunction of circumstances, yet which as surely have their origin in an evil thought indulged in childhood or in youth, as the mighty river which pours its volume of water into the ocean has its birth from the few drops issuing forth from the spring amongst the mountains.

We need not be startled at its rapid growth. Evil multiplies in geometrical rather than arithmetical proportion. Only let the young believe that it is so; only let them take the word of friends,

of those who speak to them from the results of a bitter experience. Life lies untrodden before them; they think that their course may be whatever they choose to make it;—but they are treading it now. Even at this moment, whilst looking onwards into futurity, they are framing, shaping, moulding that futurity. If in after years their hand be the hand of a traitor,—if they sit in the Presence of Christ, join in His service, kneel at His altar, vow themselves to be His servants before men, and in their hearts feel that they are *too* often the helpless slaves of Satan, it is because *now* they would not resist him.

The lesson is preached more or less by all who have advanced in life, and are not sunk in sin; but by none more earnestly than those who, in the midst of the distractions of middle life, are waging the fiercest war against it. Could their voices be heard, as in the solitude of their own chamber, or in the sacred privacy of the services of the Church, they pour out their lamentations before God, how often would their tone be that of agonising regret for the sin which now so easily besets them, because, in the folly of their early years, they weakly neglected to resist it. Traitors in the Presence of Christ—unwilling traitors now—because once in their blindness they betrayed Him wilfully! It is a bitter, bitter punishment. They who are called upon to endure it can but fold their hands, and bow their heads in meekness, acknowledging the justice of God's judgment,

and praying Him to look upon them in mercy. They who are yet spared may turn to Him in praise and thankfulness, whilst with trembling hearts they search their own consciences, to see if there be aught therein which may hereafter bring so grievous a result.

The inquiry will soon be answered. Is there a single fault of which they have been perpetually reminded, but which they have never yet heartily striven to conquer? No matter how trifling it may be; let it be only a careless habit—a petty inattention—that fault is sowing its seed for future years. It has a power more fatal than many far greater to the outward eye. It can be more injurious than vanity, more destructive than passion, more heart-chilling than pride. It is the traitor ready to open the postern door by which Satan is hereafter to enter, and gain possession of their hearts.

And once more, and yet more earnestly, let it be remembered that there are sins, habits, states of mind, against which we can receive no warning except from conscience. Our friends know nothing of them; but we feel ourselves, or we suspect, that they are wrong. We are not indeed absolutely sure; we can give plausible reason to ourselves why that which we desire to do is not sinful; or why the thoughts which it pleases us to entertain are not contrary to God's law. Perhaps our powers of sophistical argument are such that we can even persuade ourselves not only

that we are not wrong, but that we are actually right. But conscience still warns; we are uneasy—we wish we could be sure; we think that we will ask advice; in the meantime, until we can find some one from whom we can venture to seek it, we follow our own will.

Is there really so great a danger in all this? Are we not acting in ignorance, and therefore in innocence?

When conscience has spoken, ignorance can no longer be our plea. Dangerous and wild as may be the errors into which men have fallen when they have professed to follow the dictates of conscience in regard to what they *shall do*, they have found, and will ever find it, the safest and surest guide in regard to what they *shall not do*.

“To him that doubteth it is sin.” We may not be sure that a thing is wrong, but are we certain it is right? In all those cases in which self-gratification is involved, there is no safety except in obtaining a true answer to this question. And if at this moment we are conscious of any one habit, or train of thought, or indulged feeling, which conscience bids us *distrust*, we may well gather up all our resolution in God’s strength, and on our knees pray Him to enable us to cast it from us; lest hereafter it should be the witness against us, that we have wilfully paved the way for being amongst the number of those who, seated at Christ’s table, have proved the traitors that betrayed Him.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF SIN.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 23.

“And they began to inquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing.”

THE first dawning upon the mind of the possibility of committing a deadly sin is very overpowering. It seems as if we were going back, or rather had gone back so far. But we may hope it is not really so; but only that our eyes are more opened. It is strange to remember the days of very early youth. Some sins appeared then like the sins of beings of another nature; there seemed no need to inquire whether we in any way approached them. Thus the warnings of our Lord, even against such a sin as anger, were scarcely at all understood,—the end,—murder,—seemed for us impossible. Now, in maturer age, there is probably no sin from which any of us possessing real self-knowledge would say that we were entirely safe. Even those which are most abhorrent to us come to us at times in forms which are actually temptations, but the nature of which only experience and watchfulness can discover. The feeling of fear

and horror would then be very dreadful, only that with it comes the blessedness of casting oneself on an Infinite power for protection. Not that any experience, probably, can teach us the full extent of our liability to sin; it is so contrary to our wishes to understand it. So much secret pride lurks in the heart, which is only perceived when we try to bring before ourselves that actually, in God's sight, our nature, and it may be our sins, are like those of the most degraded of mankind. And pride probably blinds us more than any other fault; it is that of which we are the least ashamed; and it undoubtedly does serve in many instances as a safeguard from grosser offences. But what is it to be saved from one sin by the commission of another? Surely there can be no more fruitful source of self-deceit; and that it is frightfully common, and a snare to the very best among us, we may all, more or less, discover, by asking ourselves—why we are so pained at the consciousness of some faults which we feel to be degrading? If we had felt ourselves open to them, we might have been grieved and penitent, but we should not have that restless, dissatisfied, irritable feeling, which makes the least allusion to them an offence. If a person with an acknowledged bad temper falls into a passion, he may be very sorry for it, but he does not hesitate to acknowledge it; but one with the reputation of a good temper is often fretted beyond expression at the mere recollection of a hasty word, and will make excuses for himself, and cast

the blame upon another, and repeat over and over again the cause of offence, simply because his pride is wounded. He has never owned to himself that he could fall, and so he is surprised, not penitent, at the discovery of his weakness. And the same may be said of other sins. The purest, simplest mind has no right to trust, for a single moment, to its purity and simplicity, as if such qualities constituted any natural safeguard. They are, indeed, through God's mercy, a protection in certain cases. Evil, in its most glaring form, is offensive to such a character, and therefore is without difficulty repelled; but as certainly as human nature is one and the same in us all, so certainly there are forms of temptation which, if brought before the very holiest mind that ever struggled through the conflict of this sinful world, would be felt to be a snare, and might prove in the end fatal.

The fact may be a key to many startling cases of fearful inconsistency which meet us in life; and it assuredly will tend to make us charitable towards them, as it ought to make us severe towards ourselves. The gulf between us and those whose names are banished from society,—whose lives are to us a mystery and shame,—may be far less wide than we, in our pride, allow ourselves to imagine. We have not sinned like them,—probably we never could do so now,—under any amount of temptation; but are there no vain follies in which we indulge?—is there in us no love of unfitting attention?—no delight in winning to ourselves sym-

pathies which have their rightful object elsewhere? There is no need to exaggerate these things; the world does not loudly condemn them; God does not punish them here as He punishes those who more grossly transgress His laws; but a Day is coming when we shall be judged not according to the outward act, but the secrets of the heart; and then, it may be, we shall see the consequences to others of the follies of which we thought so leniently; and even if pardoned and accepted for Christ's sake, shall place ourselves, with the full conviction of conscience, by the side of those,—like ourselves, now redeemed,—but once, even in the sight of man, outcast sinners.

We cannot say it to ourselves too often, for safety is to be found only in the sense of our frailty;—the perception of weakness is not weakness, but strength. When the Apostles inquired with mingled surprise and misgiving, “who it was that should do this thing?” they were infinitely more secure than St. Peter when he said, “If I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee.” We are not indeed called upon to suspect evil where none exists, but we cannot be too watchful or too obedient to the very lightest warning of conscience, when it whispers to us that we are unwise, imprudent, or foolish in the course we are pursuing.

And there is a law which many are too apt to set aside as intended for others and not for themselves, but which in the absence of the definite counsels of religion, or the advice of friends, does,

in fact, become equally binding,—the law of society. It is easy to laugh at it and profess to despise it, but we can never so do with impunity or with innocence; for the law of society, when not overruled by the law of God, is the interpreter of that law. When it is so overruled, society itself will be the first to acknowledge its inferiority. How many things there are which a woman could never be permitted to do under ordinary circumstances without being looked upon with suspicion, and yet which become actually honourable before men, as they are innocent before God, when undertaken in obedience to the claims of charity! Virtue is in itself essentially more powerful than vice—and though at certain periods the world may be governed by false codes of morals upon particular points, the influence of virtue will in the end prevail, and the laws of society will be fashioned according to those rules which experience has found to be needful for its preservation. We may not ourselves see the necessity for them, especially in our own case; but it is our pride which blinds us; and if we yield to pride and despise them, our neglect of them will surely, one day, prove a stumbling-block in the path of others, even if it should not be the occasion of our own fall.

A stumbling-block! That at least may weigh with us when no personal consideration can. We permit ourselves, for instance, in some thoughtlessness of conduct, or set aside some of the ordinary proprieties of life, in order to indulge ourselves in

a freer interchange of sentiments and feelings with a period whose society is agreeable to us, and we feel quite safe; we know that we are; so—we should be shocked and angry if any one were to suggest to us that evil could be the result of such conduct; and in the meantime we profess a high standard of religion—we are devout, charitable, in all other cases, self-denying. Our influence for good we believe to be as extensive as our wishes. Does it never strike us that we may be exercising an influence for evil also?—that others, encouraged by our example, may venture upon conduct which, though safe to us, is full of danger for them? The world, we should remember, judges by actions; and when it sees conduct which experience has proved to be dangerous practised by those who profess to be influenced by motives purer than its own, it will laugh those motives to scorn, or consider the profession of them an unreality. There is much of such inconsistency in the present day. Under the plea of religion, forms and etiquettes are set aside, and freedoms, which the world would never allow, are insisted upon as a necessity for spiritual life. This was not the law of Christ. "Render unto Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's." Pay to the laws of society that respect which society has a right to demand—there is our rule. Who has given us a right to dispense with it? Whilst the scoffer looks upon the neglect of that respect with ridicule, so also, we may be sure, do the earnest-minded watch it with sorrowful regret.

And if we ourselves are in the slightest degree conscious of acting in a manner to incur the accusation, we cannot be safe without examining into the cause of our conduct. Is it the result of obedience to the claims of imperative duty, such as all must acknowledge? Is it merely self-indulgence? Or do we allow ourselves in it because we imagine it will conduce, in some way, to our spiritual improvement? Even if the latter, we are treading presumptuously on ground which is insecure, and the time cannot be far off when we shall be made bitterly to repent our error.

A vast distance lies between the acknowledgment of weakness repeated in childhood, and the deep consciousness of its extent made in mature age; but a still greater distance will be found to exist between the confession of imprudence now, and the discovery that imprudence was sin hereafter.

TRUE GREATNESS.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 24—27.

“And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them ; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so : but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger ; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth ? is not he that sitteth at meat ? but I am among you as he that serveth.”

It is remarkable that our Lord does not turn aside the minds of the disciples from the desire of greatness, but only points out to them how it is to be attained. The longing for greatness, like the desire of praise, is inherent in our nature : it is the natural result of the perception of goodness—goodness and greatness being in our minds originally one—because both existing in God. For that which really attracts us all, the worldly as well as the religious, is not evil, but goodness ; either real goodness or its counterfeit. The most wicked man that breathes does not admire wickedness, or applaud it ; he applauds boldness, energy, fortitude, the love of freedom,—something—whatever it may be, which his code of morals allows to be a

virtue. But self-deceit leads him to think that he has discovered these qualities where, in truth, they are not to be found; and it is this which is really his fault; not the feeling of admiration which arises in his mind instinctively. And so in like manner the desire of greatness is part of the desire of goodness, because power and rank, and the other constituent elements of greatness, are in themselves elements also of goodness, and in whatever form they present themselves, they have a natural power of attaching us, and we cannot help acknowledging it. To bid us, therefore, crush the desire of obtaining them is simply to bid us undertake an unprofitable task. Some persons may feel their attraction more than others; but taking human nature as a whole, there must always be that within us which sympathises with these things and desires them, and that with an innocent desire, because they belong to the sinless inhabitants of Heaven.

It is very important to us to own this truth, because it will assist us in governing ourselves, and in directing others. One of the first endeavours of a young mind, newly awakened to religious feeling, is to root out every desire or liking which may in any way be connected with the world's admiration. Accomplishments are dreaded, because they may tend to vanity and a love of distinction. The pleasures of taste are looked upon with suspicion, as mere forms of worldly refinement and exclusiveness. Any appreciation of

worldly advantages is considered actually sinful, and the effort is made to destroy it. And still, after years of conflict, the light-heartedness of youth will delight in amusement, the refined mind will sigh for the gratifications of arts and accomplishments, the good things of this world will present themselves to us as blessings; and the heart, judging itself, sinks in despair at its own weakness, and feels it has made no progress in goodness, because it has not learnt to despise that which God never intended it should despise.

No doubt many would call this a very strange assertion, and as a proof of its fallacy point to the warnings in Scripture against the love of the world. And no one can doubt that these warnings are most clear and striking, and that he who would venture to call them unnecessary would be sinfully presumptuous. But the words of our Lord to His disciples, when He bade them seek greatness through lowliness, would tend to show us that our danger lies not in the involuntary desires and tastes which He himself has implanted in us, but in the means through which we seek to attain their gratification.

The world's greatness—including in that term its rank, power, art, luxury, and refinement—are in themselves worthy of admiration, insomuch as they are the visible symbols by which God is pleased to represent to us the treasures kept in store for us hereafter. They are pictures,—scenes, acted before us for our amusement and informa-

tion; they give us ideas, and awaken feelings which otherwise would have lain dormant; and as the picture of a lovely landscape does really possess loveliness, so do they really possess a certain value. But to look at them as realities, to view them as more than transient representations placed before us for a special purpose, and when they have done their work to be set aside as worthless, is to bring ourselves back to the condition of children, looking upon coloured glass, and believing it to be a priceless jewel.

The strength of Satan's art lies in this power of deception. He seizes upon these inherent predispositions which form a part of our original nature,—which are not only sinless in themselves, but fragments of a perfect creation,—and presenting to us the picture of greatness, he whispers to us that it is reality. In our blindness we believe him. Feeling in ourselves that inextinguishable longing for its acquirement which proves to us—whatever may be urged to the contrary—that God intended us to obtain it; we put the whole energy of our being into its pursuit; we follow after it, while still it eludes our grasp; and at length, when, jaded and heartsick, we are allowed for one moment to put forth our hand and touch it, we find that it is but a shadow.

That is the history of the majority of the world's followers. There is another record less sad but equally disappointing: it is to be found in the lives of those who, earnest but fearful, have turned

aside from the ways of the world, and followed some self-chosen path, in the hope of crushing, by self-discipline, the natural likings which, because they too often lead to sin, are thought to be in themselves sinful. How weary that conflict is—how unceasing, and for the most part vain—we may gather from the confessions which from time to time have reached us from their own lips, and which are confirmed by the painful inconsistencies of character that meet us in the records of their lives. The man who rejects with scorn the offer of worldly ambition, can yet take delight in the homage offered to his spiritual excellence; the woman who would shrink from mere worldly pomp, as from the most hateful temptation, can yet be led away by the follies of religious dissipation, and the love of religious display.

We may well fear for the consequences when we attempt to be wiser than God who made us. The temptations accompanying a love of power and greatness are resisted far more successfully when in God's strength we face them than when in our own strength we flee from them. Look at the world,—look at life as it really is,—and what is the value of its gifts? Or rather,—look at death and at Eternity.

One hour by the bed-side of the dying will reveal to us more of the realities of our present existence, than years spent in solitary conflict with the involuntary longings of our hearts.

The spirit about to leave us is, if accepted

through Christ, returning to the bosom of its Saviour, and awaiting the glories of Heaven. What will it carry away from this mortal life?

The applause of the multitude? the consciousness of influence? the pomp of wealth? the dignity of rank? the pride of intellectual superiority? Alas! God's angels and the spirits of the just know nought of these; they judge by another standard than ours. The greatness which they prize has no connection with the rank, or the influence, or the intellect of earth.

But is all, therefore, vanished? Are the tastes, the joys, the high instincts, the pure longings of the immortal spirit to moulder with the mouldering body, and, unlike it, to know of no resurrection? When the hour of final consummation shall arrive, will the heart that has thrilled, as the acclamations of multitudes followed the recognition of glorious deeds, be insensible to the hallelujahs of angels, when they bear it in triumph to heaven? Will the soul that has felt the full energy of its Being aroused by the consciousness of power be insensible to the voice of its Redeemer, when, because it "has been faithful over few things, it is made ruler over many things"? Or will the refined and exalted taste which has revelled in the beauty of nature and art, and led thousands to appreciate and understand them, be cold and dead when it enters the gates of the Golden City, and gazes into the clear depths of the River of the Water of Life. Surely, if those feelings and those

tastes are to meet us on the threshold of Heaven hereafter, they can never be crushed with impunity now. No. Rather let us be ambitious; let us delight in glory, power, rank, beauty, and the refinement of taste and cultivation of mind which we naturally associate with them,—only let it be the reality, not the shadow.

Who is more glorious than God? Who has more power than Christ? Where shall we find rank above that of the angels and archangels—the thrones and principalities of Heaven? Where discover loveliness more perfect than in the far-off land where we shall behold the “King in His beauty”? Amongst whom can we meet with tastes more refined than amongst the beings who shouted for joy over the creation of a sinless world? or minds more cultivated than those which, before earth was created, were studying the wondrous works of Him who is perfect in knowledge?

These are the realities of which earth's greatness and refinement are the picture. To seek for the fulfilment of our desires here, is to seek for it apart from the Being in whom all greatness is centred. There is but one true greatness, as there is but one true goodness—union with Christ, and through that union a participation in all that is His.

And to be united with Christ is to be one with Him who gazed upon the “kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them,” and then turned away to live on earth homeless and despised; to spend

days in charity, and nights in prayer; to wait upon the needs of the sick, and minister to the sorrow of the afflicted; to make Himself the servant of His disciples; to forget His own agony in their trial,—not because He contemned greatness, but because He knew how only it was to be attained; and looking forward to the joy set before Him, “endured the cross, despising the shame,” that He might afterwards “sit down at the Right Hand of God.”

RECIPROCAL SYMPATHY.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 28—30.

“Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

PROBABLY we have all read very often, without thought, the words, “Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations,” and those which follow, “I appoint unto you a kingdom.” They seem at a first view to belong to subjects above and beyond us, and to be addressed so peculiarly to the disciples as scarcely to concern us. But there is an inner meaning in all our Lord’s sayings, as well as in His actions, which gives them, in fact, a universal application; and these words, evincing as they do our Redeemer’s wonderful appreciation of human sympathy, both in joy and sorrow, especially appeal to the common feelings of mankind. They prove, if anything were wanting to prove, how entirely Christ partook of our nature! The wish for the comforting presence of friends in hours of trial, the love which is the result of love, we can all so well understand!

Yet not, perhaps, all : there are some persons who, although they may share their joys, have a kind of pride in rejecting sympathy in grief; they say they have only one wish at such seasons—to be left alone. Doubtless, we are formed differently, and it would be very hard to condemn others because they cannot find comfort in that which helps ourselves; and there are unquestionably states of mind in which the desolation of the heart is so unutterably great, that it can find relief only in the Presence of God. Upon such we must look with loving awe, offering only the support of our prayers. But there are lesser trials, in which sympathy would seem to be the right and necessary offering of one human heart to another, and yet in which no opening is afforded for it, because the sufferer deems it a proof of heroism and strength of mind resolutely to suffer alone. If it be so, then—with all reverence let the words be said,—our blessed Lord was not strong—not heroic. In the prospect of danger He dwelt fondly, almost, one may venture to say, gratefully, on the fact that His friends had continued with Him in His temptations; and still, when about to endure a greater extremity of suffering, His human weakness seemed to find support in the certainty that they would watch with Him. What He vouchsafed to feel, surely cannot be beneath us. To accept sympathy is as great a duty as to offer it; and of one thing we may be all sure, that if we refuse to accept it, we shall never be permitted to offer it.

The world, taking it as a whole, has a very true sense of justice in all these cases. Whatever may be the outward differences of rank, and position, and circumstances, there is still in the bosom of all a secret sense of equality, founded upon our common humanity. The beggar receiving alms from a prince, knows that it is not only his duty, but his right, to return the kindness shown him, whenever it shall be in his power. To accept a favour without the recognition of this right, is to be degraded justly in our own eyes; and if, when the beggar offers his acknowledgments, whether by word or action, he is rejected, the pride which rejects neutralises the kindness shown, and it ceases to be kindness, and becomes an oppressive obligation.

The same principle is true with regard to feeling. We may devote ourselves to labours of self-denying love; we may spend our fortune in charity, give up our time to education, exhaust our strength by working amongst the poor, even show the greatest comprehension of their distresses, and, after all our labours, find that we have failed to gain affection, and scarcely extorted gratitude, because the obligation is all on one side. We have never allowed it to be seen that we also have sorrows; that we, like them, can suffer from anxiety and grief; that we shrink from bodily pain, and grow weary with earthly disappointments. We have laboured amongst them as amongst beings of a different nature, and they return us the cold ex-

pression of their thankfulness, but they give us no place in their hearts.

Sympathy must be reciprocal ; when it is not, it ceases to be sympathy, and becomes compassion ; and compassion alone can never touch the heart, and make it thrill with love and thankfulness.

There are mysteries infinitely beyond our understanding connected with the Redemption of man, and we dare not say that aught which has been done might have been effected by other means. Yet we can imagine the pity of the Almighty touched by the misery of His fallen creatures, and His compassion planning their salvation, without the full exhibition of that oneness of nature which was shown in our Saviour's human life. He might have descended upon earth, dwelt among us, and even died for us, and we might have recognised Him as God, without having learned to feel for Him as man.

The love inspired by such a recognition would have been very different from that which the thought of Him inspires now. If the sighs which told the bitterness of His heart as He pursued His earthly labours had never escaped His breast,—if the tears which fell at the grave of Lazarus had never been shed,—if the yearning which made Him cling to human affection while conscious of its powerlessness to save, had never betrayed itself in the mournful question, “Will ye also go away?”—and if, in the last tremendous scenes of His life, there had been no confession of exceed-

ing sorrow, no entreaty that the eye of His earthly friends would watch for Him in His lonely misery,—should we have loved him as we do now? He bids the weary and heavy laden come to Him. Would they then have been able to obey the call without a misgiving? Doubts might surely have arisen,—fears,—hesitations. Pride might even have whispered, that He who professed to aid them could have no real comprehension of their necessities; that when He bade them take His yoke upon them, He desired a service for His own honour, and not for their good. If the cross had not been acknowledged as suffering by our Lord, should any of us have had the courage to take it up and follow him?

These may seem to be imaginative suggestions, and to have but little bearing upon daily life; but the tone of mind which shows itself so opposed to that of our Redeemer, though less frequent, is perhaps more dangerous than the weak giving way under suffering, which is universally reprobated. It dignifies itself indeed by many names,—reserve, fastidiousness, fortitude. It is compatible with many most valuable qualities;—with real strength of mind, self discipline, an unwearied exercise of compassion,—but hard, though it may seem to say so, it is, when wilfully permitted and indulged, based upon pride. The essence of unselfishness is to accept from others that which we would wish to offer, as well as to give that which we desire to receive. We can never have any lasting influence

upon the human heart unless we act upon this principle,—and though to strive after influence is in itself a fatal error, yet we are all answerable if we neglect the means of exercising it. A mother loves the child who depends upon her for every earthly comfort, but so also the child loves the mother because it feels itself necessary to her happiness. Even in the relationship the farthest removed as it might seem, from such a necessity, there must be, therefore, a reciprocity of obligation, for the growth of human affection. And how much more so in other cases ?

Unreserve,—simple and true,—is always winning. And when we reject sympathy, and shut ourselves up in silent, unapproachable endurance, we close the door to unknown opportunities of usefulness, and repel the hearts which might otherwise, through God's help, be assisted by us on their way to Heaven.

TEMPTATION.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 31—34.

“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto Him, Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death. And He said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest Me.”

OUR Blessed Lord prayed that St. Peter's faith might not fail, and it did not eventually. The immediate fall was foreseen, for Jesus adds, “And when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren;” evidently implying that the Apostle's present state of mind must lead him into sin.

This consideration may give us comfort when our own prayers against sin are not immediately answered, especially when temptations are not taken away. No doubt the experience of temptation is one means, and a very important one, of teaching us how to “strengthen our brethren;” and so far we may be well contented to submit to it; and, looking back upon our past lives, there are probably few of us who are now, in any degree, striving to win others into the right way, who would not own that our past conflicts, even when

they have ended in defeat, have been a great assistance towards obtaining the influence for good which we may now be permitted to exercise. But it does not do to forget that although conflict is necessary, defeat is not. Our Lord endured the former, the latter He never knew. "He suffered, being tempted," and therefore He is able to succour them that are tempted, but sin—meaning by sin, not the participation of evil, but the participation in it—is no essential part of that original nature which came pure from the Hands of its Creator. It is the attribute of fallen, but not necessarily of human nature; and our Redeemer had no need of its experience in order to become one with us, and to understand our difficulties.

In some respects, indeed, ignorance of sin in our personal experience, assists rather than prevents our comprehension of it, for it enables us to see it in its true light. A drunkard does not perceive the extent of his own degradation. A selfish man does not see the full meanness of his selfishness. Even when in a measure recovered from sin, we cannot estimate its enormity till we have removed far from it; and perhaps the most awful revelation of the Day when all secrets shall be known, will be that of the guilt of our sins, seen as they will be, in the light of a redeemed and purified nature. We may not therefore strive to soothe the reproaches of conscience by any such vain thought as that the sins which burden it have given us experience which was necessary for us. We might

have gained the experience without the sin. And although young people may be inclined to contradict such a statement, yet as we go on in life, it will unquestionably be found to be true. The knowledge of evil is necessary in this world for the attainment of good. There is no use in denying the fact. But there are two ways of acquiring it; one which we choose for ourselves, the other, which God appoints for us;—the former is the way of destruction,—the latter, through God's mercy, the way of life.

All knowledge of evil which we have gained by our own wilfulness, whether it be by the actual commission of sin, or by putting ourselves in the way of temptation, and allowing ourselves, from idleness or curiosity, to witness or search into it, will leave an indelible stain upon the mind. Years of patience, remembrance which never forsakes us, regret ever freshly renewed, tears shed in the secrecy of our chamber, prayers which rise up to Heaven in the night season;—they may all be ours, and all accepted by God for Christ's sake;—but the evil wilfully acquired, is still contamination, and when it presents itself to the memory, it will be felt to be such. The more earnest are our endeavours after present holiness, the more we shall shrink from anything connected with past offences. We shall feel that we dare not trust ourselves to face sin, because once we have yielded to it; and with the instinct of self-preservation, we shall too often fear to place ourselves in

positions of usefulness, because we feel that we have that within us which would make them positions of danger. Such knowledge of evil is, and must be, weakness.

The knowledge which is strength comes to us in a very different way. It is acquired either by successful opposition to the wickedness of our own hearts, or by the circumstances of our lives, ordered as they are by God's Providence. The mere glance at a forbidden book may taint our minds with thoughts which we can never forget; whilst tales of wickedness brought before us without our choice, leave scarcely an impression behind. An idle suggestion from a companion whose society we know we ought to avoid will haunt us in our best moments, and distract us in our most earnest endeavours to do right; whilst actual association with the very outcasts of society, when undertaken from duty, will only purify our hearts, and raise our thoughts to God.

There need be no morbid shrinking in any of us from looking at the world as it is. It is not the sight or the hearing of evil which constitutes sin. God and His holy angels look upon it always; and when our Redeemer bids us stand by His side and look also, we need have no fear of the consequences. Doubtless Satan desires to have us all, that "he may sift us as wheat," and he would fain seize upon outward temptations as the means of effecting his purpose. But the permission which grants his desire comes from ourselves. There is One always

at hand to pray for us that our "faith may not fail;" and whilst we turn to Him in humility, Satan may seek, but he has no power to injure us.

But St. Peter was tempted, and he fell. That, after all, is the fact which comes home the most nearly to all. None of us can look at the experience which we have gained and say that it has not been acquired, more or less, through the instrumentality of defeat rather than of victory. And is there, then, no use to be made of it? Must memory be nought but sorrowful repentance? Must the insight into the weakness of human nature which has been given us by the sad perception of our own folly be utterly thrown aside? As we journey on through life, we add, day by day, to the burden of our consciences; and though we cast it upon Christ, and He vouchsafes to bear its punishment, He does not undertake to bear its memory. Can we, then, make no use of that memory?

"When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." That was the command to St. Peter, and through him to us also. In so far as we are converted—turned from the error of our ways—our business is to keep others from falling as we have fallen. And with this object at heart, we may calmly and steadfastly review our past lives, and bring before ourselves the occasions and the circumstances of our transgressions.

It is part of the mysterious Providence of God, and one of the great arguments by which our faith may be strengthened when overpowered by the

sight of wickedness,—that there is in all evil, as it is exhibited to us on earth, a power of working out good. Evil that shall only produce evil forms no part of God's government. And the evil in our own lives may undoubtedly, when used for this end, become an instrument of incalculable good.

How were we led to sin,—be it great or little? Were we left without sufficient warning? Then let our first object be to take care that none over whom we have influence are suffered in like manner to walk in ignorance of danger. Were we vain, proud, self-willed, speculative, curious? The germs of all these faults probably lie hid in the breasts of the children whom we are called on to guide, or the companions over whom we have influence; and we must look at them, not merely as they are now, only in the germ, but as we know by our own fatal experience they may one day be,—bringing forth their fruits of misery and shame; and with the earnestness which that knowledge gives must we rouse others to the struggle in which we ourselves met with defeat.

And we need never fear lest this use of evil should accustom us to look on it with indifference. No one who has ever truly repented of any sin can for one moment cease to wish that he had not committed it. But the feeling that we are thus turning it to good will give us courage and energy. We shall no longer be oppressed by memory, and in the brightness of our hopes for others, we shall look with hope to the future for our-

selves. For past and repented sin is like a dark lantern,—it has two sides; one which is full of gloom; the other which illumines our path with light. The dark side is that which we present before God in the depth of our secret repentance; the light is that which,—with the knowledge of forgiveness,—we are permitted to place before our fellow-creatures, in the earnest devotion of our lives to their benefit.

THE PAST THE INTERPRETER OF THE FUTURE.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 35—38.

“And He said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing, Then said He unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. For I say unto you, That this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me; And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning Me have an end. And they said, Lord, behold, here are wo swords. And He said unto them, It is enough.”

At the moment when the disciples are going into danger, our Lord carries back their thoughts to the time when they went forth to preach his Gospel without any earthly aid, and yet found that they had need of nothing. It would seem that He desired to lead them to acquiesce in the trial coming both upon themselves and upon Him, not from a mere hopeless feeling of its being in vain to struggle against it, but from a conviction that it was a part of the fulfilment of prophecy and of the mystery of Redemption. If he had helped them before, doubtless He could help them now. It was not power, but will, which was wanting. They had but to acknowledge the wisdom of that Will, and

their hearts would be at rest. This kind of submission is the only one which is fitting for a Christian. There is a great deal of mock resignation in the world,—a great deal in our own hearts. As life goes on, the conviction that certain trials are unavoidable presses upon us strongly. After continual disappointments, we cease to hope; and because we no longer seek to escape from our lot, we call ourselves resigned. But there is a test by which we may safely try whether such acquiescence in circumstances is true resignation or its counterfeit:—that which is true is cheerful, willing, reasonable; that which is false,—gloomy and stoical. Our Redeemer here, as in all cases, gives us the key to the obtaining of the right feeling. It is founded upon experience of the past. Life, as it has been, is a book always at hand, in which the tale of God's individual mercies to ourselves may plainly be read; and with this view it is good for us to look back upon it at our leisure in its great outlines, and to endeavour to regard it as a history belonging to some other person, which we are permitted to read.

Very much may be learned from such a survey, more especially if we inquire into the life of the mind as well as that which is exhibited only in outward events. For no one entering steadily and conscientiously upon this review of life can fail to recognise a wisdom and justice in God's past dealings which must inspire confidence and resignation for the future. We may have had lives free from anxiety, or the reverse; that is not the question: we may have

been saved from threatened misfortunes, or been all but crushed under them ; the point now under discussion is not affected by these outward events ; although doubtless we must all discover, when engaged in such a retrospect, that Love has interposed to save us from suffering in ways wonderful and unexpected. But let our experience be what it may, there can surely be no one among us with any amount of sincerity in his heart who, if called upon to write the history of his life,—including in life the formation of his principles and opinions,—would not trace, through all the intricate workings of sorrow and of joy, the guiding, training, loving Hand of a most merciful Father. God may have suffered us to be afflicted, but through the affliction He has worked in us either a consciousness of sin, or a power of endurance, or an enlarged sympathy, or some one of many qualities which must in the end further our eternal welfare. And this is not a forced view of life ; it is not the result of a predetermination to view everything in what is called the best light ; it is simply reasonable. The circumstances of the life of each individual, so far as regards himself, have but one object,—the training of his soul for Heaven, the fitting him for companionship with angels, and preparing him for the Presence of God. And this is the view of the past which alone will give us confidence to meet whatever may yet be awaiting us.

It has been said that every man's autobiography if truly written, would be deeply interesting, and

no doubt the saying is true, but we can scarcely trust ourselves with such a task;—there is in us too much self-consciousness;—the eye of the world follows us so searchingly, even in our apparent secrecy. We profess to write for ourselves, but the thought of the opinion which may be formed of us still haunts us, and though we seem to be alone, we feel ourselves really surrounded by witnesses. For man, there is but one solitude—the presence of God; and in that presence alone may we dare to look upon ourselves as we have been,—as we are,—and as we may be.

We need not attempt to shut out from ourselves any fact which that sight may bring before us. Pride and truth can never dwell together in any human breast. As we confess our sins before our Redeemer, so let us also acknowledge what we have done to serve Him; and the acknowledgment, when made, as it then must be, in the deepest consciousness of weakness, will but serve to strengthen our faith, to confirm our hope, and to give us a more entire resignation to His Will.

If we have been permitted to do anything for the good of others, or in the work of self-discipline, it has been by the operation of God's grace, acting through the outward circumstances of our lives. Let us then reverently try to trace the progress of that work. Strange, indeed will be the revelations made in the course of such an inquiry. Events which the world would have called most dangerous will be seen to have been the means of our safe-

guard. Trial which it might have been thought would surely lead to a fall, will be discovered to have fostered a spirit of strength and constancy. Temper perhaps was our besetting sin, and we were placed in a position where it was most sorely tried ;—but the very greatness of the temptation awoke us to the necessity of battling with it, and by the strong Hand of God's Might it was struggled with and subdued. Our vanity perhaps beset us. We had that belonging to us which might naturally call it forth, and we were sent into the world to receive its homage ;—but even before the snare beset us, God revealed to us that it was awaiting us, and by prayer and watchfulness we were enabled to guard against its approach ; closing our eyes and stopping our ears to the very least whisper of its seductive voice, because we knew that for us there was no safeguard but to crush our enemy at once—that to parley with it would be destruction. Or, again,—we may have been naturally anxious, distrustful, careful about the things of this world, and God may have seen fit so to order our lives, that they shall have been one continued course of harassing uncertainty and responsibility ;—here also we might have yielded to a slight temptation, but this has been so great that we were compelled to flee to God to save us from it. Such a life could not be borne without trust ; and the extremity of our anxiety has taught us to be in a measure un-anxious.

These are but a few instances of the way in

which life may be so reviewed as to give us a full, undoubting confidence in the Love which awaits us for the future. Even if we see nothing of what has been described, if we can trace no efforts and no victories, yet at least we have been taught to know our weakness. So far as we are in any degree in earnest,—and it is only an earnest mind which will undertake the inquiry now alluded to—that earnestness is the result of the spiritual education through earthly channels already given, and the pledge of that which is still to come.

For us also, even as for our blessed Saviour, there are, though in a very different sense, things written that “ must be accomplished ; ”—not indeed without or against our will, but through its training and purification ! He “ who willeth that all men should be saved,” has therefore willed our salvation. There is a place in Heaven prepared for us, a crown of glory awaiting us, angels are expecting us, our Redeemer stands ready to welcome us. But there are also, it may be, hours of bitter grief on earth in store for us,—heart-sickening disappointments, bereavements that shall make our homes desolate, anxiety that shall destroy every sense of present enjoyment ;—all to be met with and endured. The one life is the necessary, the inevitable preparation for the other.

Who will be so cowardly as to shrink from it, or so unthankful as to repine at it ? In years gone by we may have labored without care ; now, and in years to come, we may have to toil in doubt and

dreariness ; but it is the same God who prepares our lot, whatever it may be, to the end that all which is destined for us may be accomplished,—that we may be fitted for our place in the Kingdom of His Glory.

HABIT.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 39, 40.

“ And He came out, and went, as He was wont, to the Mount of Olives ; and His disciples also followed Him. And when He was at the place, He said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.”

“ HE went as He was wont.” That expression, like so many others, brings up the image of common life. There are such numberless things which we are “ wont ” to do,—which we do without thought, but which are leading us on surely, though noiselessly, to the scene of some great trial ! It is a fact which forces itself upon us irresistibly as we journey on through life, increasing every day in experience, and learning to read more clearly the “ coming events which cast their shadows before.” In youth we take the day as it appears,—we see the blossom of the present moment, but we never think that hidden below it lies the seed-vessel of the future ; and it is only when memory retraces our steps that we marvel at our blindness in not having discovered the beginnings of the events which now are fully developed. But it is very different in middle life. Then, every fact that occurs has an under-meaning, because we feel, that although per-

haps unimportant in itself, it is an advance towards something beyond. The quiet motion of the minute-hand over the clock is the impress of the footstep of time;—and time as it journeys must lead us to the striking of the hour which shall bring us change.

Even if it were not so,—if life could pass without painful and startling events, which probably it never does to any one—there is one event which must, sooner or later, be the end of all that we are “wont” to do—we must die: and this great necessity, this change which none can escape, is in itself sufficient to make our every-day actions of incalculable consequence, and to give force, if such were needed,—to our blessed Saviour’s warning: “Pray that ye enter not into temptation.” Well indeed may we pray whilst doing that which we are “wont” to do, that so the things which we are not “wont” to do may not be the occasion of our fall.

For the power of a change of circumstances is felt more or less by us all. The mind which can stand unmoved by it is at once recognised as having a strength to which others must bow. Some persons—many perhaps amongst the young—are so much at the mercy of these outward events, that they become, even to themselves, different beings, according to their different situations. There is no intentional insincerity. They do and say simply according to their feelings, but the feelings themselves are altered. With the good and earnest

they also are earnest; with the frivolous they also are frivolous. They have, in fact, no character of their own; and this, which at first may appear only weakness, too often in the end proves the prelude to great sin.

But the evil is born with them! The excuse is offered by themselves, and charity is willing to accept it. That, however, is no true charity, which is contrary to the judgment of God. The excuse which will not be received at His Tribunal is not one which can be safely offered by any of us now. If we are indeed so changeable,—if new scenes, and sights, and companionship, do indeed so strongly affect us—it is because we have not chosen to put strength of principle into those with which we are familiar. The disciples were wont to accompany their Lord to the Mount of Olives;—it was a customary practice. If in those daily walks their eyes had been so open to danger that they had learnt to look forward to it, and sought for strength to guard against it, they would not have required the special warning which at last fell powerless upon their ears:—“Pray that ye enter not into temptation.” We are not now inquiring, whether such a perception of coming evil would have been possible or desirable for them. There are some sudden temptations which God, in His wisdom, sees fit to permit, probably for the purpose of trying and humbling us; but those to which a weak will is usually exposed are not sudden. We fall into them by degrees; we may even be said

to walk into them with our eyes open,—confessing and bemoaning our weakness, yet still advancing surely on the road to destruction. These are the sins for which weakness of will is no excuse. For it must be remembered, that if a will be weak for goodness, it is in a measure also weak for sin. It is not hurried on by violent passion or eager imagination. The feet move towards Satan; but the face turns towards Christ. A wretched humiliating downfall that is which follows!—more hopeless perhaps than the headlong plunge of desperate wilfulness,—for as there was no strength to fall, so there is no strength to rise again.

Earnestly, indeed, may those in whom such weakness is found be urged to seek the only means by which, through God's grace, it can be supported. God has given them a safeguard, if they can but be persuaded to use it. The most powerful agent, either for good or for evil, with a weak will, is *habit*. It is powerful indeed with all; but a strong mind can burst its bonds. The things which we are wont to do are the things which most of us feel at last we *must* do. If they are consecrated to God, we become the servants of God; if they are yielded to the devil, we become the slaves of the devil. A weak will can, therefore, through grace, strengthen itself by outward props. For instance,—there are certain moulds into which our lot is cast; we rise at certain hours, take our meals at fixed times, have certain definite occupations more or less important. These actions

engender states of mind which form habits,—and habit, as it has been said, is all powerful with a weak will,—it constitutes, in fact, its strength. If, then, with our common regular actions, we associate others which are religious, they will become by degrees equally necessary and equally habitual. Suppose we resolve to seize a few minutes for private prayer every day before dinner, or after dinner,—the ordinary habit of dining will be a support, as it were, to the extraordinary habit of prayer. If left to ourselves to choose whether we would pray or not, we might one day perform the duty, and the next delay and deliberate,—and in the end neglect it; but because we are accustomed to associate the act with another, which has from use and necessity become a habit, we feel ourselves constrained to continue it. This kind of necessity we may all have observed in ourselves, when we have been compelled in any way to break through our usual habits. If, in travelling, we are awake the greater part of the night, and retire to rest at day-break, we feel a necessity to say our prayers, as we call it, before going to bed,—a necessity arising from something quite apart from the needs of the moment, or the thankfulness inspired by having reached our journey's end in safety. We may, indeed, have such feelings of gratitude, as we may also have prayed silently and earnestly in our night journey; but we are not satisfied unless, before we lay our heads on our pillow, we kneel to ask God's blessing and protection. That is the

devotional habit,—only habit,—worthless in itself as a form, but valuable—oh! how incalculably valuable God only can tell—as a safeguard against the instability of the human will.

Much is said by earnest-minded persons of the danger of forms,—and they are dangerous; no one can have watched his own heart without perceiving it. But there is far greater danger in living without forms. Form without spirit is for the time dead, yet whilst it remains with us it is the ever-present witness to the existence of the spirit which once inhabited and may still return to it. But spirit without form may die, and none be aware of its departure. A person accustomed to pray at certain times, may kneel and repeat a form of words without feeling, and his service is lifeless; but by the very act of prayer he acknowledges that devotion is his duty. A man accustomed to pray only when the wish is present, becomes engrossed in the business of the world, and forgets that prayer is ever required of him. And so in all other cases. The strength of our weak nature,—setting aside for the moment that one only strength which is derived from God,—is to be found in habit and association; and a weak will cannot form religious habits apart from common ones. Its safety, therefore, is to seize upon the latter, and by them to attain the former. And this not only with regard to prayer, but in every other instance in which such association and habit are possible,—most especially in the avoidance of

temptation, and the cultivation of a spirit of watchfulness. The sin which besets us daily will most probably come to us under certain forms and circumstances, which are daily likewise. We are fretful under some customary annoyance; as it draws near we may meet it with customary prayer. We give way to indolence at certain times; we may then associate with the temptation some particular thought of our Saviour; or recall some text of Scripture which shall rouse us to energy. A duty is required of us which we are always tempted to escape, or to perform negligently; when we have failed, we may compel ourselves instantly to retire to our own chamber, or in some other way secretly to offer special prayer for forgiveness and help. These and many other such ways there are, by which a weak will may, through the influence of habit, become strong; and when thus in all accustomed actions we have learned to look to our Saviour, we shall be so prepared for more sudden temptations, that the very instinct of our renewed nature will bid us "rise and pray," and through God's help, battle with and subdue it.

THE TWO WILLS.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 41, 42.

“And He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from Me : nevertheless, not my will, but Thine, be done.”

God’s Will ! Most wonderful that must be ! Yet we speak of it continually. Every day we talk of its being God’s Will that certain events should happen. In every plan for the future we are—if we think rightly—accustomed either silently or openly to utter the reservation, “if it be God’s Will.” What do we mean by this ? God’s Will cannot be an arbitrary impulse ; it must have an object, and even a law, though we do not always recognize such a necessity. Were we to do so it might make us more humble ; less exacting—if the expression may be used—in our prayers, and more simple and trustful in our faith. We know that God is Omnipotent, and that His Will can do all things ; but we forget that He cannot will contrary to His Will ; that He cannot will what would defeat His own purpose.

But that purpose we say is our salvation, and

we believe, in many cases, that we know what is likely to conduce to our salvation. Here again are we not blindly in fault? God does will our salvation—there can be no doubt of that fact—but may He not will many things besides? May not salvation be but a portion of that Eternal Will? The Will which embraces Eternity and Infinity, which is absolutely perfect, absolutely wise, cannot be limited to the events of time and space. Salvation,—though it be the end of this present creation, will we know be only a beginning of that which is to follow; and what that second creation may be, what may be its object and its development, who can dare to say, or even to imagine?

The mystery of the Infinity of God's Will must be readily acknowledged by all thinking persons; but when it presents itself to the mind it is generally put aside as involving subjects too deep for the human intellect, and leading to dangerous speculations.

Yet if, as it would seem from our Blessed Redeemer's prayer of anguish, in it is to be found the root of all resignation, all humility and obedience, we may surely—with prayer for the guidance of His Spirit—do well in some way to think upon it.

The Will of God must once have been literally and perfectly our will, since it was the will of the human being who came pure from the Hands of his Creator, with the Image of that Creator stamped upon his heart; and although, fallen as we are, we can now but with difficulty trace it, yet there are

indisputable proofs of its existence. The very desire, the perception, the comprehension of goodness, common both to the heathen and the Christian, the mere fact that Infinity and Eternity are needs of our being, show that the impress of Divinity which was once engraven on us is not yet effaced.

But there is also in us a lower will, consequent upon our inferior nature. It is not necessarily sinful, for it was shared by our sinless Redeemer : but its inferiority is proved by the fact that if it could be satisfied to the utmost extent of which it is capable, it could never produce happiness. The higher will would still remain, which, formed for Heaven, cannot find rest on earth ; and pining for Eternity cannot solace itself with Time. And here probably is to be found the cause of a fact which all persons who have thought about themselves must have observed ;—that we never really know our own will to its full extent. If we were asked at this moment to decide perfectly what we desire,—what we will,—what we know would make us completely happy,—there exists not the human being on earth who could answer. Some things, indeed, we may know that we wish for, some blessings we may be certain would increase our happiness, and the words “ union with Christ,” would to the Christian express everything for which he would earnestly pray ; — but who can tell all that union with Christ implies ? We will—but we know not what we will ; and for those who have no such desire by which to shadow forth the longings of

their souls, there must ever exist a vague, unsatisfied yearning,—a will which wanders forth into Infinity, and loses itself in the boundless sea of never-ending existence ; and because it knows not what it seeks, sinks back, jaded and disappointed, to forget itself, if possible, in the gratification of the lower will—the will which embraces earth, and which will then strive to become the lord of its being.

But the higher will, the deeper longing, cannot thus be crushed ; for the events of time, and all that befalls us—whether inwardly or outwardly—in the period of our probation, are really inseparably connected with Eternity. The Infinite Plans, the Everlasting Counsels of God are in the process of being carried out by those very circumstances which we refer to the province of the lower will. The objects for which too many of us so earnestly strive, looking upon them only as connected with earth, are tending to the attainment of some grand object, deep in the depths of God's Will, which shall have its fulfilment in a far-off Eternity. If we are disappointed in them, it is but because by that disappointment some mighty work, unknown to us, may be furthered—a work not, we may believe, involving exclusively our salvation, but some scheme of which our salvation forms a part. To obtain the satisfaction of our will,—our lower will,—cannot, therefore, really be to have our will, for our *real will* is the higher will, the will which we derived from God, and

which, therefore, whilst on earth (and surely also when in Heaven), can only be satisfied by resignation and obedience. There is an illustration which may, perhaps, be used without irreverence, and which may help us to see this more clearly :—A child, unable properly to hold a pen, comes to us desiring to write a letter. It knows, in a certain way, what it wills, but the idea it has formed of its own will is imperfect, and it cannot understand how to attain it ; therefore, it trusts itself to our will—it places its hand in ours, and consents to be guided. But the child has two wills : besides the desire to write, it desires also to form certain figures which suit its fancy ;—and thence results a struggle. If, subduing that lower will, it can trust simply to the person who guides it, its first wish will be attained. It may not see or understand by what means,—it may not even comprehend, when completed, the object for which it has been labouring, but it will not be the less successful. If, on the contrary, following its secondary will, it attempts to take the guidance of its own movements, it will so far attain its object, that it will form certain characters, but it will not, therefore, have satisfied itself. The first object—the higher will—must still remain unfulfilled.

Would to God that we could all feel that we are—what, indeed, we are—children, called upon to work for objects which we do not see, and which, if we did see, we could not understand, but in which are involved the power of Almighty Love, the

blessedness of an Almighty Creator! Christ felt it. He who was one with the Father, who saw all, and knew and comprehended all—He, in that hour of His great anguish, became as a little child, because He knew—as none other could know,—that His lower will, sinless though it was, would, if permitted to work, frustrate the purpose and the object of that vast, glorious, unutterable Will, which had planned from Eternity to Eternity; and by which not only the creatures of the earth, but the blessed inhabitants of Heaven, were to receive the fulness and completion of their joy. Therefore He said, “Not My Will, but Thine be done.”

The offering of the will! It is the only offering which it is ours to bring. And, God be thanked! its value depends not on the forms under which it is made. Let it be but perfect, without reservation, and God will accept it, whether it be exhibited in the resignation to a passing throb of pain, or the agony which ends in death.

PAIN.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 43, 44.

‘And there appeared an angel unto Him from Heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly ; and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.’

WE use the word “agony” so commonly without any intention of expressing its full meaning, that we do not at all realise what “agony” in the Bible language must be—agony in its full intensity. There is much evil in such exaggeration. The word which has been applied to our Redeemer’s trials might well be thenceforth sacred to us ; only to be used in connection with pain, sanctified by faith and resignation, and thus united with His sufferings. Perhaps we scarcely know how much we deaden our own power of perception, and therefore of sympathy, by the unreality of our daily conversation. We have but one instrument by which ordinarily we can hope to arouse feeling either in ourselves or others,—language. It is made use of under all circumstances, and in all cases. The Bible words are not different from the words in which

we address each other in daily life—not different that is in themselves, only different in their arrangement; and one of the great difficulties which we must all at times feel, in awakening ourselves from a state of torpor and indifference, arises from this fact. The words we read are so familiar to us that they cease to touch us. There is, doubtless, a counteracting blessing. If religious language was different from common language, we should learn to look upon religion even more than we do, as apart from the duties and pursuits of common life. But we are very unwise, if not actually wrong, in so using the words which have been applied to hallowed purposes, as to associate them chiefly with trifles.

Agony is intensity of pain, either of body or mind, and pain, being accepted by Jesus as his earthly portion, became from that moment sacred. Whenever we can thus regard it, we are at liberty to adopt the language which expresses not only our own suffering, but His; never otherwise. Such a thought, if carefully cherished, would check many a hasty, discontented, exaggerated word, as it would surely soften every repining feeling, when great pain of body or distress of mind is really our trial. The former is to some more fearful than the latter — probably because they have never experienced it. The calm endurance of great bodily anguish is to them a marvel so astonishing, that it raises the sufferer far above themselves, whatever may be the other circumstances of his condition. The very

shrinking which they feel at the sight of agony humbles them to the dust with the thought how little they could be able to bear it. Such persons will speak but little on the subject; they feel, in approaching it, that they are venturing to describe an unknown land, and that those familiar with it will soon discover their ignorance.

But there is a lesson to be learned even from the very dread with which persons unused to pain, look forward to it. It does not seem that the Redeemer of the world was — if one may dare to use the expression — braver in this respect than ourselves. The anguish of the Cross seems to have been so present to Him at all times, that it became the subject of His allusions long before the hour of death drew nigh. His thoughts dwelt upon the sad details. He spoke of them to His disciples, again and again. They were the topic of what would appear to have been lengthened conversations. “From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things.” And again, very shortly after, “While they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him.” And a third time, as they were going up to Jerusalem, He entered more fully into the subject, making mention of the mocking and scourging. Doubtless, all this was said in mercy, to prepare His friends for that which was to follow; but there is nothing which can lead

us to imagine that our Lord was in any way insensible to his own share in the coming trial. The weakest, most sensitive, and timid among us may find comfort in the consideration that, although Jesus bore his agony of body with unflinching fortitude, yet, on its approach, His soul was "sorrowful even unto death," and the Angel of Mercy was sent to strengthen Him.

It is by thus looking at pain as connected with Christ that we also may hope to be strengthened to bear it. All which exalts and ennobles suffering rouses naturally a spirit of fortitude; whilst any thing which helps to teach us what we owe to our Redeemer must be a blessing so great, that we can surely never murmur at the suffering by which it is to be attained. With such a thought, we may even have a feeling of regret if we have been spared great pain. Yet He who orders pain knows the weakness of each individual, and apportions the amount of trial with unerring wisdom. And the way in which slight pain is borne, or rather in which we shrink from it, may be a clear proof how unfit we are for more. If we watch ourselves during the course of any one day, and mark our impatience at the slightest discomfort,—how little we can bear a cold blast or an oppressive heat, how overpowered we are by a passing headache, or the throbbing of a tooth,—we shall learn very much of our own weakness and of our Redeemer's endurance. And so, perhaps, we may be taught to receive these petty trials in the way which will alone prevent us

from repining under them, and give them dignity by association with Christ. Trifling though we know them to be, yet are they too much for our cheerful endurance, until we have learned to welcome them as the faint shadowings forth of that which He bore.

In days of old it was a part of Christian piety to make pilgrimages to the land where our Lord lived and died. As the traveller walked the streets of Jerusalem, and gazed on the scenes of his Redeemer's agony, the sense of that agony became so vivid, that he returned—or thought he should return—to his home with feelings of devotional gratitude which could never again die away. It may have been an error, a delusive hope. Satan, as we know, again exercised his dominion over too many of those who had knelt by the Holy Sepulchre, and in truest earnestness vowed themselves to the service of Satan's conqueror. But it was, at least, the error of a loving heart; and who shall say that the offering of that heart was not accepted? And life—the most humble, the most commonplace—is it not also a pilgrimage? The allegory has been brought before us so often, that we turn from it almost with weariness. Yet there is one way in which we may make it very real. We are indeed treading in our Saviour's footsteps. Our life has outward features resembling His, and through them we may recall the image of His earthly existence, even as though we trod the olive-garden of Gethsemane, or knelt in awe and thankfulness on

Calvary. What we cannot see, we may teach ourselves to feel; and when we receive a pang of anguish with the remembrance that pain was Christ's portion, and that in bearing it we are like Him and brought nearer to Him, we shall scarcely wish it to be removed from us.

Yes: that is the real blessing of all pain, be it great or little. Until we have endured it, there is still, as it were, a wall which shuts us out from full sympathy with our Redeemer. He can feel for us, but we cannot feel for Him. He stands apart from us. We look upon His suffering with awe; but we have nothing of our own by which, even in an infinitely remote degree, to measure it. And the words, "being in an agony," are read by us with cold hearts and voices which neither falter nor tremble; and we turn away to murmur at the least touch of discomfort, the faintest shadow of pain, and call our petty griefs misery, and the passing jarring of our nerves agony.

Humbly but earnestly, indeed, may we hope that God, as He shall see fit, may teach us what that word really means;—that He may teach us according to our need, slowly, gently;—leading us on, step by step;—sending His angel to strengthen us when we shrink at the prospect before us;—supporting us up the long ascent before we reach what, if necessary, must be the place of our crucifixion, yet still teaching us,—not sparing us,—not allowing us to fall short of any degree of faith, or love,

or gratitude to which we may attain through the tribulation either of soul or body.

If a place in heaven farthest from our Redeemer could be ours without pain, would we accept it, if one—close by His side, immediately in His loving Presence—were offered at the price of agony?

The suggestion is but imaginary. It is not the amount of pain endured, but the spirit in which it is received, which brings us nearer to, or sends us farther from our Lord. Yet it is no imagination that through suffering the spirit is perfected in the likeness of Christ.

“He, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared; though He were a son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.” And still the most favoured amongst His disciples are those who are permitted here to share the cup of which He Himself drank; and who hereafter—brightest and most glorious in the company of His redeemed—shall, through Eternity, “rejoice with exceeding joy.”

May He help us all so to accept the share of pain, of whatever kind, now by God’s mercy given us, that we may be prepared for that further portion which He shall see needful to bring us nearer and nearer to Himself!

EXERTION IN SORROW.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 45, 46.

“And when He rose up from prayer, and was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow, and said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”

SLEEPING for sorrow! At the first moment, that strikes us as strange. The common idea is that grief is sleepless; and it may be with some persons, but it is not so with all. When danger is vaguely anticipated, but not actually present, or when the first anguish of a great suffering is past, there is a physical drowsiness which sometimes seems to paralyze all the powers of the mind. But even if this were not so, it is unquestionably true that grief has a deadening effect on the mental, and even the moral faculties; and in this consists its danger. It is a great mistake to suppose, as so many do, that affliction rouses us necessarily to a sense of duty; that persons are purified by suffering as mechanically as gold is purified in the fire. If the process of purification is to take place, the metal cast into the furnace must be really gold; for if base metal should be placed under the same ordeal it will

melt; and in like manner it is only that character, or that portion of the character, which is really sterling and pure, that will come forth purified by the furnace of affliction; all that is base and selfish will be overwhelmed by the fierceness of the trial. There is indeed no doubt that many persons exhibit traits of goodness in seasons of adversity which, according to our human calculation, would never have been shown in prosperity. But this is not necessarily the result of the mechanical working of trial. We know very little of the inmost lives even of those who are nearest and dearest to us; still less can we judge of those of our ordinary friends and acquaintances. We call persons frivolous and worldly, because we see them mixing in gay society, and surrounded by the allurements of wealth; but we know nothing of the hidden longing for better things,—the struggles after holiness in the midst of difficulties—the sincerity of heart which makes the conscience tender and uneasy; and renders the life of gaiety a life of self-denial. When such dispositions shine forth brightly in the hour of adversity, we say that it is affliction which, through God's mercy, has changed them; but it is not so. God's mercy has indeed removed the stumbling-block from their paths, but the disposition is what it was before; and when cast into the furnace the gold is purified and the dross cleared away.

It is especially necessary for us to remember this, because we are apt to indulge an unreal romance with regard to trial. Perhaps most persons

who give way to day dreams have, at some time or other, placed themselves, in imagination, in positions in which they were exposed to it, and have nobly borne up under it; and if conscience should whisper that the same heroism is not shown in daily life, the natural answer is, that strength will be forthcoming when the cause for exerting it is sufficiently strong. Thus men and women—yes, and children also,—judge of themselves, not by what they are, but by what they believe they could be; and the first step towards ridding ourselves of this self-deceit may be, to remember that the natural tendency of grief is to cause us to “sleep for sorrow.” It absorbs us so as to afford a legitimate reason for attending to nothing else. With some persons it becomes a morbid self-indulgence, and is actually cherished and nurtured. Everything which would disturb it is carefully shunned; the claims of daily duties are looked upon as intrusive; and although time, as it goes on, softens the bitterness of sorrow, it has no effect upon the form in which it has been embodied. Instead of a real, natural grief, one which is exaggerated and unnatural has been created; and this cannot be parted with without a sacrifice of the selfishness which originated, and the vanity which fostered it. In such cases, where is the healthful result of affliction to be found?

Our Lord's words to His disciples give us the only true guidance for our conduct under trial. “Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”—

“ Rise ”—be active, watchful, earnest—only trust not in yourselves. Grief cannot afford to neglect any precautions. It dares not loosen the reins of self-government, for they are already slackened by the intensity of feeling. The rules for daily conduct which were needed in prosperity can never be spared in adversity; and the first duty we neglect because we are unhappy, is the precursor of that uneasy spirit of self-dissatisfaction (wholly unlike repentance), which will at length rise up as a cloud between us and our God, and veil from us the brightness of his consolations. But how seldom we act upon this conviction! We say, perhaps, that we cannot summon resolution to attend to ordinary occupations, and that we need relief. Instead, therefore, of employing ourselves, we sit idle; instead of walking, we lie down; instead of endeavoring to employ our minds usefully, we indulge in the distraction of a novel. These are all opiates. They lull the pain for a time, but it will return with tenfold bitterness afterwards. “ Rise and pray; ” there is no other remedy. Duties fulfilled, though with an aching heart—prayers uttered, though with faltering lips—these will soothe us, even by the very efforts which they compel us to make. “ When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble. ” And when is there any quietness like the quietness of conscience? If it be needed in joy, how tenfold more in sorrow?

And the warning, if needed for ourselves, may be useful also as regards our friends. It may hap-

pen that we see those we love overwhelmed by affliction, crushed beneath the weight of some sorrow, which seems to leave them no power of rising again. Under such circumstances the advice commonly given is to seek something which may distract the thoughts. Travelling, society, and cheerful amusements, are recommended and tried, most probably in vain; the wound is too deep for any such remedies. What is needed is perfect resignation to God's Will in feeling, and this can be attained only by a loving devotion to His Will in action. When we are consciously, not mechanically, working for Him, we cannot help loving Him; when we love Him, we acquiesce without a murmur in what He appoints. The suggestion of some little duty of affection, or benevolence, will in many such cases be far more in accordance with the depression of a broken heart, than a plan for a foreign tour. The sense of usefulness is a tonic; amusement is but an opiate. The reason why so many mothers, left widows in youth, are able to rouse themselves from the blow which it might have seemed would overpower them, is that they have something still to do, an object still to live for, and with this there can be no overwhelming desolation. The temptation is, "to sleep for sorrow," but they are compelled to rise; and in their loneliness and dreariness of heart they cannot but pray. And the remedy which is effectual with them will be found efficacious more or less with others.

Still more is there need to "rise and pray," when

trial is drawing near and we are looking forward to it.

With trial temptation is inseparably joined. And it is coming to us in an unknown shape. Observation teaches us that no one set of human events is ever presented to us a second time in the same form; and therefore no experience of difficulties which are past will prepare us perfectly for those that are to come. And as we know not our foe, so neither do we know the weapons upon which we must seize to defend ourselves. *All* must be in readiness, or that which we most need will be wanting in the hour of danger.

“Rise and pray.” It may safely be our motto in all trial. And if we could feel that every temptation to which, in our sorrow, we yield, betrays the soul for which Christ died into the hands of Satan, His enemy, we might hope that it could never be forgotten.

THE KISS OF BETRAYAL.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 47, 48.

“And while He yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss Him. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?”

THAT seems the worst kind of betrayal, yet probably it is in some degree the most common, not indeed consciously, but still actually. Few of us are guilty and hardened enough openly to turn against our Lord, yet who is there that is not tempted more or less at times to betray Him, under the pretence of doing Him honour.

Such conduct is especially the danger of an age which, like the present, may be described as religious. To talk of persecution now is almost a mockery. Religion is universally respected. The peculiar form under which it may exhibit itself may be obnoxious to certain persons, but it is not religion itself which is the cause of offence; all parties agree in professing to hold *that* in high estimation. Rank and talent and wealth are enlisted on its side, and the world, true to its principles, bows the knee before it with a willing heart, giving its

outward homage to God, so that it may give its inward devotion to the Devil.

These may seem strong words, but if the fact be true, they cannot possibly be too strong. The most striking evidence of public opinion perhaps is to be found in the tone of the public literature of the day, which is read, criticised, blamed, but in reality respected and obeyed. How condescendingly religion is patronised by it! how calmly and impartially, for the most part, praise and censure are dealt out,—the writers standing aloof from all parties, regarding their contests with an amused indifference, and professing to be anxious only that all should have fair play; and especially that nothing should interfere with the furtherance of that particular amount of religious belief which they profess themselves!—a belief to be found exclusively neither in the doctrines of the English nor of the Romish Church; neither in the tenets of Baptists, Independents, Quakers, nor Presbyterians; which has “no form, no local habitation, and no name,” but which, as it is said to prevade all, may, it is supposed, be equally honoured in all.

It sounds very plausible, and there is an element of liberality on the surface which serves to conceal the lukewarmness underneath; and when such a state of feeling exists in the world at large, it must, more or less, have its influence upon individual conduct.

Outward devotion to God, and goodness under any form, will command respect, and respect is

dear to us all; so there is no difficulty in being what the world calls religious. Persons professing one set of doctrines are careful to keep up reverential and ritual observances; persons professing others, think lightly of them, and substitute in their stead abstinence from certain amusements, while both make use of peculiar expressions, supposed to embody peculiar principles. A third party stands apart from either, but has still a religion of its own, carried on under the form of schools for general education, homes for the destitute, and relief for the starving, with a mode of expression which is its own likewise, and in which liberality and philanthropy hold a prominent place.

But the worship of Christ—is it necessarily amongst them? God forbid that any one should presume to say that such external demonstrations of religion are in their nature hypocritical; that they are to be condemned, or even discouraged. Whilst we live in the body we must worship with the body; and nothing has been more clearly ascertained than the fact, that in religion, as in life, if we destroy the body, the soul will depart. The tone of public opinion which does honour to the outward forms is, therefore, so far true and right. They are worthy of reverence; though superstition, or prejudice, or self-seeking, may be found in them. But there is a question to be considered by each individual, which is of little moment now in the eyes of the world, but on the answer to which will

depend the sentence of Eternity. This outward reverence—is it with us the result of the love of God, or the love of man, or of ourselves? We give our Lord apparently the Kiss of Peace, are we very sure that it is not in reality the Kiss of Treachery?

Vague though the question may appear, a sincere conscience will soon make it clear in detail; for every religious act, and every occupation connected with religion, performed without a corresponding motive, is in its measure the betrayal of Christ with the Kiss of Peace. How many such there are, and how Satan must rejoice over them! To turn the weapons of an enemy against himself is one of the most exulting achievements of warfare.

And it is not a question of bad motives; the motive may not be absolutely bad. Custom, convenience, amusement, love of society, curiosity, are not in themselves evil; they are only very liable to perversion when applied to actions which have a religious aspect. There lies the danger of religious parties, religious meetings, bazaars for religious purposes, conversation obtrusively upon religious subjects;—or, on the other hand,—a devotion to rituals, church adornment, and discussions which, however they may bear the semblance of interest in church matters, can scarcely be designated by any other name than church-gossip. It may seem a hard thing to say, but many of us are safer when engaged in occupations avowedly con-

nected with the world, than in those which, without being strictly devotional, profess to be connected with religion. This does not in the least imply that all such occupations are to be avoided,—in their degree many may be excellent and useful; but if the worldly element be the attraction, they may be good for others, but they are assuredly not good for us; and when we are compelled to dress up our religion in the garb of the world, in order to render it palatable to those who would not otherwise accept it, we may be sure that, whatever may be the outward semblance of good, we are but ministering to self-delusion and hypocrisy.

The evil is very insidious. For instance,—we join what is termed a worldly party, or one which is formed ostensibly for the purpose of amusement; and we face that danger at once. Amusement, like business, may, we know, lead us astray. But God does not forbid recreation; human nature requires it; kindness, sympathy, and unselfishness may be fostered by it; therefore, we have no scruple in taking part in it. Still, because it does not profess to be religious, we are on our guard; we fear lest vanity or self-indulgence should tempt us, and we watch against them.

But we go to a religious party, and we think we are doing a religious act; there is such a show of unworldliness in it, that it scarcely strikes us as necessary to inquire whether there is a reality also; and so unawares we become vain, or cyni-

cal, or presumptuous, or even insincere, or hypocritical; and at the very moment that we worship Christ with our lips, we are turning to Satan with our hearts. Or, again,—we employ ourselves in some common pursuit, with no definitely serious object, only, it may be, in compliance with necessity, or friendship, or the forms of society; yet, if we are in earnest, we make an effort to put a higher spirit into it, because naturally it has none of its own. But we spend our time in teaching in schools, acting as members of charitable societies, working altar-cloths, and decorating churches; and because we have been consciously employed upon the things of God, we do not deem it incumbent upon us to inquire whether our thoughts may not, at the very same time, have been given to the things of Satan.

Fashions are always more or less mournful to those who ponder seriously upon them. We think the old monks mistaken who believed they were doing God service when they spent their time in illuminating missals; perhaps they would think us more than mistaken if they saw the trouble which is sometimes taken at the present day to illustrate and ornament portions of God's Holy Word merely as specimens of taste.

In our more serious moments, we have all probably been tempted to sigh for the opportunities of a more definite religious life; we imagine that with religious services, conversation, employments, there would necessarily be religious safeguards.

But God deals more wisely with us than we should with ourselves. He wills to make us sincere; and these things upon which our hearts are set would possibly be to us temptations to insincerity. The situation in which we are placed,—the advantages, or even the disadvantages, which in the ordering of Providence are provided for us, these, we may be assured, are the best for our spiritual education. Further privileges may be desired and prayed for; and if the prayer be granted, they will assuredly prove blessings; but, if it be not, we may fear that they would be stumbling-blocks, or snares. God only knows our hearts. But better, far better, must it be for us never to have the opportunity of offering to our Lord the Kiss of Peace, if by such an apparent privilege we are tempted to bestow on Him the Kiss of Treachery.

ENERGY.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 49—51.

“When they which were about Him saw what would follow, they said unto Him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And He touched his ear, and healed him.”

THERE is a wonderful contrast between St. Peter's hasty zeal and our Lord's divine calmness; but it is long before we learn to appreciate the difference. Age and experience may assist us, though the danger then is of lukewarmness and indolence. Young persons, from the very violence of their feelings, sympathise peculiarly with energy; but they judge of it ignorantly; they marvel at the power which sets the universe in motion, and forget that it is an exercise of the same power, intensified, which preserves it in its uninterrupted course. This human view of energy, which is especially a sceptical view in abstract theology, and leads men to deny the attributes of God from the very order and care with which they are exhibited, leads also to most injurious practical results. And it is the peculiar characteristic of the present day, and the

temptation, probably, of every one who attempts to take a leading part in directing public opinion. We must all not only *do*, but we must feel that we are doing. We cannot be contented with the conviction that our work is being completed, but we must see, and actually be conscious of the process of completing; if not, we draw back in disappointment.

Our Redeemer's life teaches us a very different lesson. He could, as He Himself tells us, have saved Himself by a miracle. But He had a work to do, so unutterably important, that, in His inward human feelings, "He was straightened till it was accomplished;" yet for which for three and thirty years He had tarried—labouring, suffering, praying, till His hour should come; and so he would suffer and pray still.

Was there no energy in this? Surely endurance is stronger than impulse, for it is the prolongation of the life of impulse. Perseverance is the highest form of energy, for it is the continued exertion of energy.

The slow accomplishment of all things is, indeed, one of the greatest mysteries both of reason and revelation. It is in vain to search into it, but it is not in vain to strive to learn from it. It may be that the gradual working of the operations of Nature is necessary as an exhibition of the attributes of Almighty Power and Wisdom. He who said, "Let there be light, and there was light," could, in like manner, have called the heavens and the earth into existence by one word. The fact that

creation, as it now is, was a consecutive not an instantaneous work, is a self-evident proof that it was best it should not be so. Still more is it a proof that some wonderful exemplification of power and goodness is hidden under this same principle of continued rather than instantaneous energy, when we see it exhibited not only in the works of the natural world, but in the dealings of God with the spiritual world.

Redemption, so long expected,—salvation, in its fulness, so long delayed,—the lingering probation of this weary earth,—the patient waiting of the spirits of the just in the land of the departed,—what does it all mean? Surely, again, endurance must be better, wiser, more merciful, more just, more energetic, than impulse, for it is the characteristic of the dealings of the All Holy One. He forbade the stroke of the sword which might have freed Him from His enemies. He bore with evil because it was to be conquered by endurance; and now He summons us to do likewise.

Yes,—to bear with it even in ourselves. Our work lies before us, to be completed, when—God only can tell; and we therefore need not ask. Strange though it may sound, the *fulfilment* of our object is not our object, because it is placed beyond our reach. We sigh for sinlessness; we labor to attain it; but we have set before ourselves a wrong aim, and no marvel that we are disappointed in attaining it. Sinlessness, indeed, we must long for; if we do not, we are not prepared for Heaven. Sinlessness,

also, we must labour for, since any known and wilfully permitted sin must separate our souls from God. But our object now is not the peace of Heaven, but the long endurance,—the patient abiding struggle of earth. If to be sinless were man's task, then would the first fervent prayer be accepted, and the sinner be at peace for ever. What God does not see fit to grant, we must be content to wait for.

Well may we be patient with ourselves, since God is so. Patience will help and cheer, and even stimulate us, far better than eagerness. For to be patient, though it implies calmness in the presence of evil, implies also a full consciousness of its guilt; no yielding to it, for that is not patience, but impatience; no acquiescence in its existence, for acquiescence is but passive yielding. It implies a prudent energy, exerted without intermission; a sense of duty which wakes, when feeling sleeps; a vigilance seldom surprised, because always in a state of preparation; a hope never cast down by failure, because knowing that failure may, if we will, be converted, through God's help, into another form of the struggle, which shall ultimately end in victory. Patience, therefore, must ultimately secure our object. Each day's work, each day's effort, that is what we are to set before us. It is a task within our compass, and open to our self-examination, and our repentance. If we provide for it, we shall do all that God requires of us; for the struggle of to-day is, though we may not per-

ceive it, the vantage-ground from which we shall set forth to-morrow.

Thus only shall we bear our part steadfastly in life. There are times when it seems to us very long—when in weariness of heart we lie down at night, and in weariness rise in the morning, and still before us stretches the long and seemingly interminable future, with the necessity of continued effort and an unrelaxing vigilance; and we say to ourselves, “One effort, however great; one struggle, however terrible!—if that were all, it could be borne.” Yes, indeed, it could be, but in that conviction lies the answer to all our questioning as to the lengthened probation of ourselves, or of this fallen world.

Energy and power are to be found in endurance; and energy and power alone can enable us to fight by our Saviour’s side on earth, or to share His triumph in Heaven.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 52, 53.

“Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to Him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against Me! but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

OUR Lord's human feeling shows itself especially in the shrinking from insult; He says not merely, “Be ye come out against me,” as if it was an injustice, but He adds, “as against a thief, with swords and staves?” We may enter into that part of His trial by remembering how we ourselves feel, when anything happens to us in the least degree approaching to insult; how even the best and humblest minds are overcome by it. False dignity is no doubt often confounded with true, but the latter does not the less exist; and as no wound is so painful as that which touches it, so when the sense of dignity is lost, the character is inevitably degraded. This arises from the fact, that dignity, like every other noble quality, rests upon truth, and when the sense of truth is gone, or even injured, deterioration follows as a thing of course. He who was perfect, must, in His inmost soul, have recoiled from the

imputation of imperfection ; but that can never be our case. We may be insulted by a neglect of the respect due to our position in society, to our age, our sex, or any external distinction which is rightly ours ; but we can never be insulted by being treated as sinners, even the worst of sinners. The thought would perhaps help us to bear many slights which now fret and anger us. Whatever we may be accused of, the insult lies in the form, not the spirit of the accusation. We may resent the one, but if we search into our own hearts we shall find no cause to resent the other. It is the habit of acknowledging our sins *in general*, and shrinking from entering into detail, which deceives us in this matter, and by giving us a false impression of ourselves leads us to exact more than our due ; and unconsciously too many of us aid this self-deception even in the very act of self-examination.

We profess to carry on the search into our consciences in God's sight, but we are aware at the same time that we have no new revelation to make to Him ; that He knows all before we can tell Him. We cannot shock or startle Him who is Omniscient. We know also that He is infinitely removed from impurity, that it cannot touch or affect His nature,—and in our ignorance, we feel, though we may not acknowledge it, as though this fact did in some way render Him insensible to it. We reason unconsciously from our own experience. The quality in sin, regarded abstractedly, which distresses and disgusts us most, is that it is akin to our

own nature. Illustrations of this fact come before us daily.

Living in quietness, with no temptations to the indulgence of violent passion, we may read with comparative indifference of excess of cruelty, or fierce temper, for we are not aware that we have that within us which might, under equal temptation, lead us to equal fault; but a tale of fretfulness, irritability, and selfishness, will excite our keen indignation, because we understand it. And so in other cases. We do not reason upon this principle, when we make our confessions to God but we feel it and are influenced by it. As there is a keener sense of shame in pouring out the story of our degradation to one, who, though repentant, has in a measure participated in the same ignominy, than to the spotless one who, we believe, has never known the taint of similar sin, so there is a deeper humiliation in bringing our offences to be judged in the sight of man than in the presence of God.

And in our self-examination before God, we are apt to dwell principally, if not exclusively, upon our besetting sin, as being that with which the struggle is chiefly to be carried on. But a besetting sin is not always, perhaps not frequently, a mean, and consequently, a humbling one, unless, perhaps, vanity may be called mean.

Selfishness, though in its nature essentially mean, assumes many forms; men are liberal, energetic, courteous, even patient, and self-controlled from selfishness; they may perceive and own this truth;

but whilst God alone sees the vice, and the world sees the virtue, the acknowledgment of the double-mindedness is not necessarily humbling.

Pride, another very common sin, is by the world looked upon as connected with a certain amount of nobleness and dignity. A passionate temper is associated with generosity and open-heartedness. Jealousy is considered to be an exaggeration of warm affection. Thinking upon such faults is not truly humbling. We know that God condemns them, and that the holy angels must marvel at them; but the Judge who condemns is also the Father who can pity and forgive; and the angels marvel, because they have no weakness of their own by which to measure ours.

There is another kind of self-examination, another mode of searching into our own hearts, which may give us a truer perception of the extent of our humiliation. It is to dive into the secret recesses of conscience, and bring to light our hidden feelings of envy and spite; our shabby impulses to be mean in the worldly sense of the word—to save our own money, for instance, at the expense of another; to be less watchful against extravagance when our friends are to be the sufferers, than when we ourselves are to incur the loss;—or again to tell petty falsehoods because we have not the courage to own our ignorance or forgetfulness; to put off upon another, with a plausible excuse, a duty which it is disagreeable to ourselves to perform; to give way to a false pretence, because we are ashamed

of our position in the world; to turn from the relations or the friends who are poor, or inferior in rank, because we think that those with whom we are accustomed to associate will look down upon us for being connected with them. It is to drag forth the flimsy boast, the wretched vanity, the foolish excitement of our social intercourse, to realize the existence, *though never* the presence, of those unholy thoughts, which though they may now be only temptations and not sins, yet are allowed to haunt us as the result of sin,—the consequences of an evil curiosity, or a knowledge wrongly acquired. These are the disgraceful things which make us feel truly that if the world were to come against us “as against a thief,” as one low and abject, and worthy only of its contempt,—it would but be placing us in the position which we deserve.

It has been said, that the pain of confession to man must lie not in the acknowledgment of great faults, but of what are called small ones; and every one who has realised the working of his own mind will probably own the truth of the observation. Small faults are those which we are the last to acknowledge, and it might be a method of daily discipline, to forbid ourselves even to make an excuse when we are accused of one. Acknowledgment,—full, free, and conscious,—is the only mode by which we can be enabled to bear the burden of them without an oppressive sense of degradation, which will injure rather than do us good.

For the humiliation of our mean faults is so

great, that persons for the most part will not look at them. If they are in earnest, they check them when they are conscious of them, but they seldom allow their minds to dwell upon them. Better far, surely, would it be to bring them before our conscience clearly, without excuse or palliation;—to see them in their deformity, to call them by their true name,—and then to place ourselves in imagination, not before saints and angels, not even before the holy and the comparatively pure on earth, but before the cynical, un pitying man of the world, the satirical devotee of fashion, the keen-eyed, supercilious, cold-hearted moralist, and with their gaze fixed upon us, to tell all, without reservation. We—with, it may be, our religious reputation, our right intentions, our profession of sincerity, our apparent simplicity, indifference to the world, unsullied purity, dignity and nobleness—what are we? By what name shall we be called?

From the answer to that question, who would not turn with relief untold, unspeakable, to the holy, but all-merciful Redeemer? Who would not pray with tears of loving repentance, that he would permit us to bear the suffering in His presence, rather in that of our fellow-creatures; that so our humiliation, however deserved, may be sanctified and blest by the consciousness of His sympathy, who bore the degradation of being treated as the vilest of human beings for us?

FOLLOWING AFAR OFF.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 54.

“Then they took Him, and led Him, and brought Him into the high priest’s house. And Peter followed afar off.”

ST. PETER’S character is more within our comprehension than that of almost any other person mentioned in Scripture. The following afar off is so common! In fact, strictly speaking, we can never be said to follow in any other way: our best obedience is so imperfect—our love so lukewarm. But there are certain times when the conviction is especially forced upon us. Perhaps these are principally when we look back upon life as a whole, instead of taking its different parts in detail. We can make excuses for each separate instance of falling short in our duty: in childhood, we were ignorant; in youth, there was the force of temptation, high spirits, bad example; in middle age, we had learnt to distrust impulses and were too much afraid of the effect our actions might have upon others,—so some palliation can be found for the lukewarmness of each period of life. But when we see what the deficiency has amounted to in the

whole, we wake up suddenly to the consciousness that we are inexcusable. We have spent pence, and are overwhelmed at finding that we have lost pounds.

A besetting sin, or a weak yielding to some petty daily temptation, shows us also most clearly that it is our nature to follow "afar off." Years, perhaps, have gone by since we were first conscious that some particular action, or temper, or habit, was an offence; and at the first moment we probably formed a resolution to overcome it, and thought that the work was done; but we prepared ourselves for the battle without knowing the strength of the enemy. A smooth stone out of the brook,—the vigorous will exerted in the strength of faith,—might, indeed have destroyed our foe at once; but the will was weak; we were "following afar off;" we took to ourselves human weapons—secondary motives—and from that day to this we have been feebly struggling, and are struggling still. Other victories may have been gained, temptations may have been overcome, and sins subdued, but we are still mastered by this one besetting evil; and when we ask ourselves what is the aggregate of all these separate offences, the conviction is forced upon us overpoweringly, that whatever the world may think of us, we have never really drawn *near* to our Redeemer—for that living in His Presence we should never have borne about with us such a continual memento of our weakness.

But the expression touches also our better feel-

ings. Happier, indeed, is it to follow even "afar off," than to turn aside to our own ways. Still is there left the longing, lingering, though trembling, desire for better things; the love which, even in its infirmity, cannot endure to lose sight of Him to whom it fain would cling.

As in human affection thousands have followed afar off, when those they loved were in peril—wives following their husbands, children their parents, sisters their brothers—afraid to approach nearer from a natural and an innocent dread; and the love has been accepted, cherished, and rewarded; so St. Peter also followed afar off, from a dread which was not innocent; and the Master whom he served, watched over him with warning—forgave, and strengthened him.

And life, this present life upon earth, what is it from its beginning to its end, but the treading in St. Peter's steps? Shame-stricken, humbled, though we may be, crushed to the dust by the sense of the distance at which we now stand from our Redeemer, yet He is in our sight, and we are permitted, entreated to follow Him. Afar off still it must and will be. Whilst this earthly nature, this body of death is ours, we can never stand side by side with our Redeemer. But He is beckoning us forward; He is drawing us closer and closer: as time passes on, He weakens the temptations which keep us back, and strengthens the faith which would urge us onward. Slowly but surely,—by degrees certain though almost impercepti-

ble,—He is lessening the distance between us ; and when at length we have reached the bound which His wisdom sees fit to appoint as the limit of our progress upon earth, His angels will tenderly close our eyes in death, and, bearing us in their arms, bid us wake in another world to find ourselves no longer afar off, but near,—close—face to Face with our Redeemer.

What that waking will be we can scarcely trust ourselves to imagine. To be enabled to obey Him—no more falteringly, but instantly—to have but one thought, one will with His—to serve Him without the slightest struggle, the least effort—to have no further need of watchfulness, but to rest in the deep calm which knows no fear of danger or of change—it is a vision of “peace which passeth understanding.” Yet is there something beyond—a peace higher and more blessed—even the peace of love ; and this shall also in that day be ours.

Obedience, we may remember, is a *part* of religion, and therefore an element of peace ; but love which includes obedience, is the *whole*. And, perhaps, one of the most unanswerable arguments in favour of the truth of Christianity may be met with in the fact, that man was created with the capacity of loving God ; and that this love is only satisfied by the revelation made of Him in Jesus Christ.

We may put aside the thought of love as a figure of speech, and limit religion to obedience, and say that the highest devotion is to be found in grati-

tude and adoration ; but there is something in the human heart which will contradict us even whilst we utter the words—an inextinguishable yearning after love, which will sooner or later whisper to us that cold faith is but a mockery.

Yes, and more than a yearning after love,—more than its fullest expectation. There is a present love—afar off indeed, weak, and often scarcely known even by itself—but so true, so real, and pure, and satisfying, that even the faint recollection of its joy in the past is treasured as the dearest hope that the heart can cherish for the future. Once freed from sin, and that love shall be ours—no more afar off, but near,—perfect, eternal.

“ I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it ; that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

We dare not speak of it in other words ; only may God grant us to know it !

SELF-DENYING AFFECTION.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 55.

“ And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.”

THAT is another action singularly in accordance with St. Peter's character. Persons of a quick, impulsive temperament, are particularly alive to physical comforts. In another gospel we are told expressly that “ Peter stood and warmed himself.” We might at first have been inclined to suppose that fear and anxiety would have rendered him insensible to all bodily need. But it was not so, and when we consider more deeply, we shall see that it was unnatural to expect it. A great secret of the common inconsistencies of what are considered generous and affectionate dispositions, may, perhaps, be found in this bodily susceptibility, and it no doubt suggests an excuse, when we are about to pass judgment upon them. But it must never be admitted in our own case. For, after all, when we say that peculiar temperaments have peculiar temptations, we merely put into other words the statement, that we are all in a condition of probation,

and that our trials vary according to circumstances. To see that we are exposed to a peculiar danger from our natural constitution, is not to possess an excuse for yielding to it, but to receive a warning to be on our guard against it. And this warning is especially necessary in the case referred to, because the fact is one which we should all be unwilling to acknowledge. Quick, affectionate feelings are very easily recognised, and almost universally received as forms of virtue. We know that a warm heart is nothing of our own creating, and that we can have no right to boast of it; yet still we do secretly pride ourselves upon it, and too often make it the excuse for hidden forms of selfishness. To put side by side with it the fact, that we are keenly alive to personal luxuries, that a failure in our usual comforts makes us impatient and fretful, may be very humiliating, but it is doubtless very wholesome. We look on colder temperaments with a mixed feeling of pity and distaste. Yet, perhaps, if the trials of life were to be reckoned up, it would be found that the pleasure caused by our warmth and generosity had by no means counterbalanced the pain occasioned by our self-indulgence and irritability; and that the quiet, equable, unimpassioned temper, so often accused of want of sympathy and indifference, had in the end contributed much more to the aggregate of human happiness, than our impulsive kindness, and glowing, but changeable and therefore earthly affection.

For it must be remembered, that all the vari-

ableness and uncertainty which we discover in our hearts are for the most part the result of physical, earthly emotions. And physical emotions are naturally selfish, or belonging to self. Our affections therefore are only valuable in so far as they are sufficiently strong to control and subdue these bodily feelings. Persons talk of their intense affection, and fancy themselves a martyr to it, whilst they cannot, even for those they profess to love most, make an effort to resist indolence, or submit patiently to a little physical discomfort. Feeling, if really intense, swallows up all such care for self; and if it does not, we shall be more true to ourselves and more honourable in the sight of God and man, if we content ourselves with a less profession of its intensity. We must shrink from passing judgment on the affections of one so devoted as St. Peter, yet it is well to remember that to stand and warm himself when his Lord was before him, a Captive, bound and insulted, was but the prelude to his denial.

It may be said, and said truly, that cold temperaments are not necessarily self-denying. Certainly not; no human being is *necessarily* anything. But if we look around us, we shall scarcely fail to discover some general principles, by which we may classify characters and temptations, sufficiently to assist us in forming rules for our own guidance. Very affectionate and impulsive persons are not universally given to self-indulgence; yet there can scarcely be a doubt, that the same physical consti-

tution which renders them so keenly sensitive to all that touches the feelings of the heart, renders them equally sensitive to all which affects the feelings of the body, and the perception of this fact may unquestionably be found very useful in the exercise of self-government. We may fairly ask ourselves how much of our own personal daily comfort we are willing to sacrifice for those we love?—how much do we sacrifice? It is not a question how much we feel the sacrifice at the moment, for that is independent of ourselves; and quickness of bodily sensation will, as has been said, probably accord with quickness of feeling; but which gains the victory? In our past experience,—looking back upon seasons of trial, when we think that we have felt the most,—what amount of endurance, self-denial, cheerful acquiescence in hardships for those dear to us, can we trace? Be it much or little, it is the real measure of our affection.

And so with our love to Christ. Not that self-mortification without an end is a test of love, for too often it is but the evidence of pride; but self-mortification for an end, under the regulation of reason, and the guidance of authority,—by that we may try ourselves. For instance, the denial of certain gratifications, otherwise innocent, because we would seek to remember the sufferings of our Lord; the restraint exercised upon lawful indulgences, because we wish to practise ourselves in a stricter self-discipline:—how are we enabled to carry it on? We make excellent rules for ourselves at the begin-

ning of Lent; how do we find that we have kept them, when we look back upon them from the end? And they are not such a very severe test. Our self-denials, taken separately, are indeed so small, that but for our past experience we should probably smile at the idea of not being able to continue them. More especially, if we have any reason to think that we have really given our hearts to our Saviour, that His love is our dearest treasure, and that to be in any way like Him, and suffering with Him, is our greatest honour.

Alas! for the lesson which each Lent teaches us. Alas! for inconsistency, lukewarmness, mean excuses which we should be ashamed to offer to a fellow-creature, professions of self-denying affection followed by delight in the least excuse for self-indulgence. Alas! for the cold, dead heart, which obeys only because it dares not disobey; which dreads the reproach of conscience, but has no thought of sympathy for Christ.

May God judge us more mercifully than we can venture to judge ourselves! May He accept what we dare not offer, and love us,—not as we love,—for Christ's sake!

SELF-GOVERNMENT AND SELF- GUIDANCE.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 55—60.

“ And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with Him. And he denied Him, saying, Woman, I know Him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with Him : for he is a Galilean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew.”

ST. PETER'S denial of his Lord is only startling to persons who do not know much of their own hearts, or have not had much experience of human nature. It is painfully probable and natural to others, and the circumstances attending it bear upon them a wonderful stamp of truth. Cowardice and self-deception seem to have been the cause of the apostle's fall. Cowardice might have induced him to deny his knowledge at first, but it could scarcely have led him to repeat the assertion again and again, whilst still remaining in the place of danger. If he had been entirely cowardly, he would have left the hall.

Self-deception, grounded, no doubt, upon the consciousness of his warmth of affection, appears to have blinded him to the weakness of his natural disposition. Self-examination, if it had ever been practised, must, we may suppose, have been carried on with regard to his feelings rather than his actions; so he placed himself in the way of temptation without misgiving, and cowardice seems only to have been awakened by the earnest, searching glance of the maid-servant. The effect of that glance we can all imagine. A very steady look at any time, from almost any person, has something alarming in it. It is the mind speaking to the mind, without the intervention of the ordinary instrument of communication; and therefore it strikes us as unnatural. With the consciousness of possessing a dangerous secret, it would at once be overpowering.

The denial followed upon the accusation, calmly as such words would, when suggested by awe as well as fear; and the sin once committed, its repetition followed almost inevitably. It is a rare instance of self-government when a man draws back, after having committed himself in the eyes of the world to a definite assertion, or a fixed line of conduct. And the great defect of St. Peter's character was the absence of moral courage. Once, therefore, having uttered his falsehood, it was almost a necessity that he should repeat it, if he remained in the scene of temptation.

Here, again, was an exhibition both of the good

and the bad points in his disposition. He loved too truly to leave the hall without knowing his Master's fate; and he deceived himself by not facing the danger he was in, and the probability that he should be tempted to repeat the offence. Perhaps, also, the very feeling that he had dishonoured his Lord kept him where he was; it was the lingering testimony to the truth of his affection. He probably remained in obedience to the good impulse, and so soothed the conscience wounded by his first offence.

The history of his fall is but the description, in another form, of the downward course which, if it has led thousands to shame and repentance, has led thousands also to the ruin which knows no repentance. Somewhat of that course we may probably all have experienced in the events of our own lives. How many, many actions there are about which we have deceived ourselves,—first saying that we shall not be tempted; and when we have been tempted and fallen, remaining still within reach of a second temptation, under the excuse of some good reason, which at the moment hides from us our danger. The consciousness of self-deception, as we go on in life is, perhaps, the most startling revelation of its own nature which the human mind can attain. Painful and perplexing is the recollection of the doubtful actions of which we have been guilty; besides those actually sinful, but into which we have reasoned ourselves by arguments seemingly good. And then to look on and think that these snares

and pitfalls meet us at every turn,—that too much anxiety may degenerate into scrupulousness and too little end in hardness of heart! It is no marvel that persons seek to escape from such difficulties, by giving up the control of their consciences to another, and satisfy themselves by the soothing conviction that all duty is contained in obedience to a *self-chosen* guide. But it is a vain attempt. They would fain shelter themselves from one form of self-deception, but only by the creation of another. Alone we are born, alone we live, alone we die, and alone we shall be judged. Whatever may be the authority to which we submit, it is our *will* which consents to it, and our *will* which is responsible. Self-government is, therefore, the basis of all duty, since self-guidance is a necessity from which we cannot ultimately escape; whilst self-honesty, if one may so speak, is the essential element without which neither can be carried on consistently or acceptably.

Volumes may be, and have been written upon this subject, discussing questions of casuistry, and seeking to give rules by which the clue may be found that shall guide us rightly through the labyrinth of the world's entanglement. But God is wiser than man, and His rules are few. The difficulties which arise in their application are entirely the work of man.

“A conscience void of offence,”—sensitive therefore, watchful, strict with itself, suspicious of the

faintest indication of evil,—when a point is doubtful, giving the benefit of the doubt to the side opposed to inclination; choosing the *positive* right in preference to the *possible* wrong. Without this the struggle against self-deception is but fighting against the air; and when a heart is so guarded, it can scarcely be blind to its own weakness; more especially when it remembers that the faults to which we are most quickly alive in others are in all probability those to which we are most inclined ourselves.

“A single eye,” that is another requisite;—one object,—one wish. We confuse ourselves by thinking we have many; but one will always be uppermost. Whatever may be our doubts, we shall never resolve them satisfactorily till we have searched into our motives and feelings, and discovered what this object is. When it is discovered, the question will follow:—does it lie in the same line—does it tend to—is it consistent with God’s Will respecting us, which is made known to us for the most part by the external circumstances of our condition? If not,—the object in itself may be innocent, but the striving for it will be sinful. A child may desire something in itself perfectly justifiable, but when God has placed the duty to a parent as an obstacle in the way, no casuistry can justify the endeavour to obtain it.

Questions of conscience are much more simple than we are apt to imagine. A tender conscience and a single eye will—with earnest prayer for the

guidance of the Holy Spirit—help us out of a very large proportion of our difficulties. And if it should so happen that the conscience tends to scrupulousness, we must bring to our aid the other safeguard of reason, which can by no means be set aside in any efforts after consistent self-government. What we should allow others to do we may usually do ourselves. We are bidden to “render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s,” as well as “to God the things which are God’s.” When we rob Cæsar under pretence of offering to God, we are, in fact, disobeying God. And if the case involves, as we think, nothing which concerns others, we may remember that we should be as much bound to keep our reason clear and our judgment in sound action if we lived in a hermit’s cell, or a desert island, as in the vortex of the world’s business. The prayer and the devotion of an unreasoning mind cannot be acceptable to Him who is the author of reason. Weak scruples are, therefore, an offence to God, and any line of conduct which, if universally carried out, would militate against the reasonable laws by which, in accordance with God’s Will, society and domestic life are governed, must verge upon superstition and scrupulousness, and will therefore require to be carefully watched.

Many subjects would be included under this rule, especially those which relate to exaggeration of devotion and self-denial. It is, perhaps, with regard to these tendencies that the greatest difficulties arise, and that the need of

guidance is most felt, and its support the most eagerly sought. But the necessity of self-government remains the same through all. A clergyman or a friend may give us advice, but it can only be in accordance with the facts set before them. If our self-love or self-deceit should lead us in any degree to colour or distort those facts, the advice will be liable to be coloured and distorted in exactly similar proportion. And who is there that does not, more or less, thus misrepresent every day? Let us only watch ourselves. To speak the *exact* truth *always*, in small matters as in great, will be found, probably, to be the hardest task we can impose upon ourselves; and for this reason, that we do not always know what is truth. Certainly, as all will acknowledge, we do not, with regard to events and circumstances passing around, and as certainly—so the heartily sincere will at once own—we do not with respect to the mysterious working of our own hearts.

But truth is absolutely essential if we are to be counselled prudently. That is the reason why advice, excellent in itself, is sometimes found to be of little value; and why, after all,—after having had the aid of piety, experience, and intellect,—we are occasionally compelled to put aside everything which has been urged, and decide our case for ourselves.

Sincerity is all that God requires when we turn to Him for guidance. Truth—which is an existing fact quite apart from sincerity—He will reveal

to us as its reward. Therefore, as we *can* be certain of sincerity, and we can *not* be certain of truth, we are called upon, when advice has been given us by men, to bring it again before God, and ask Him to aid us in judging whether we may act upon it. If we adopt it without such judgment, we are endeavouring to throw off a duty which God has imposed upon us; and no plea of obedience to the advisers whom we have chosen will be accepted, if our conduct shall prove to be erroneous.

We may tremble at such a necessity; we have great need to do so; but we shall not escape it by shutting our eyes to it. Only let us live as in our Saviour's presence, keeping aloof from all which we feel, or even suspect, to be contrary to His will; and He will give us that intuitive judgment which will enable us to decide wisely, if necessary, by our own reason and conscience; or to accept and follow the wise advice of others.

Self-deceit is, indeed a great danger. If even St. Peter was misled by it, much more may we be. But He who pitied the weakness of the apostle, and restored and forgave him, is equally willing to pity, and restore, and forgive us, if only we will not place ourselves out of the reach of forgiveness, by endeavouring to shelter ourselves under a false plea of submission to another's judgment, instead of courageously, though sadly, bearing the burden of our own offences to the foot of the Saviour's Cross.

EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY LOVE.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 61—62.

“And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.”

THAT Look, we feel, must have haunted St. Peter for the whole of his after-life. So indeed doubtless it did, from the tradition which tells us that he could never again hear the crowing of the cock without bursting into tears. A like repentance might be ours, if we could realise the Look which, though we cannot see it, is still turned upon us when we offend,—the Look of tender reproach, love, compassion. But it requires a long practice in earnest striving and self-discipline, the preparation of the heart for love, before we can do this. A child's first thought,—the first thought of an older person, still but a child in Christian faith and feeling,—is, that God is *angry*, not that God is *sorry*. Yet even under the Law, anger is not by any means the universal expression of the feeling with which the sinner is regarded by the Almighty. There are verses, in the Prophets

especially, which, to human ears, are even touching in their appeals to sympathy:

“Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth! for the LORD hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.”

“O generation! see ye the word of the LORD: Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto Thee! Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten Me days without number.”

The more advanced we are in our Christian course, the more we shall perceive this mystery of God’s Love: the nearer we approach to Him, the better we shall be able to understand his character. We can scarcely imagine that St. Peter would have felt his Master’s glance of gentle reproach as keenly at the beginning of their intercourse. It was not till he had lived with Him, talked with him, seen His daily life, and striven to serve Him, that a look had power sufficient to produce such deep and lasting repentance. This consideration may be somewhat of a consolation to us when, in the first days of our earnestness, we mourn over the coldness and deadness of our hearts; but it may also be a warning to us when, as time goes on, we find that the coldness continues, that we still think of our Redeemer as a stern Master, of His Gospel

as a law of condemnation;—that we obey Him because we dare not disobey; and repent because we have angered, not because we have grieved Him.

Such is the case through the whole of life with many of whom it would be hard and untrue to say that they are not earnest, and sincere, and watchful; but their religion is imperfect; it kindles but little warmth in themselves, and has but little influence upon others. And by far the greater number acquiesce in this imperfection; not indeed that they do not lament it in word, and perhaps in heart; but they adopt the commonly received idea, that such tenderness and quickness of feeling is a gift bestowed only upon a few, and as they find they do not possess it, they believe themselves justified in being resigned, if not quite contented, to be without it.

There can be no greater injury to the Christian character than the adoption of a half-truth. It is undeniably true that quickness of feeling is a gift; but it is not true that we are therefore at liberty to be contented without it. Like all other spiritual blessings, it is bestowed independently of man's merits, but not independently of man's exertions. The gift of love is included in that chiefest and best of all gifts—the Holy Spirit. No work of man's could purchase a blessing so utterly beyond imagination; yet the prayer of man is required before it will be vouchsafed. And something more than prayer,—the effort to remove out of the way all which would be an obstacle to its operation.

Here perhaps we shall discover the real reason of that deadness in religion of which so many—otherwise earnest and sincere persons—complain.

We make ourselves cold by allowing some apparently innocent human affection or human interest to occupy our thoughts, and thus to take possession of our hearts. We plant tares in our field, or if not tares, at least seed which is not heavenly, and then mourn because we have so little room for the spiritual wheat which is to yield an eternal harvest. Our pound makes *two* pounds, and we do not think of inquiring whether it may not be our own fault that it has not made *ten*.

There is a remedy for this,—there must be ; though hard indeed is the task of softening and kindling the cold heart, when years have been allowed to pass in the indulgence of an affection which has in any degree come between the soul and God. There are those who grope darkly onwards through life, stumbling and rising, and stumbling again, wearied with their almost fruitless exertions ; fretted and irritated at their own inconsistencies ; and never awaking to the fact that they have extinguished their own light,—created their own difficulties,—by allowing hopes and plans, thoughts and labours, to be concentrated upon some cherished earthly object ; delight in which has chilled—little though they knew it—their love for God. Longings that should have been devoted to Heaven, have been chained down to earth ; feelings which would otherwise have found vent in devotion, have

been lavished upon human affection ; the toil of the intellect has been for man *first*, for God *second* ; the occupation of the thoughts has been found in schemes for the happiness of the earthly idol,—not in meditation how best to promote the glory of God ; and still there has been no visible evil, no wilful sin, no apparent neglect of duty ; only the heart is cold in religion,—for God has but the secondary place.

Yet the Redeemer is more merciful than man. He sees the good where we should see only the evil ; He accepts the half when we would acknowledge nothing but the whole ; and at length, in His long-suffering kindness, He removes the veil from the heart ; and in the day of His chastisement,—when our idol is broken by disappointment or removed by death,—the secret of the long inconsistency is revealed.

A mournful revelation must that be. If we would save ourselves from its self-reproach and regret, we must open our eyes to the danger before the hour of temptation shall arrive. God must be *loved* in youth ; and to love Him we must know Him, and to know Him we must think of Him, not according to our own low, miserable, human fancies, but according to His revelation of Himself in the Gospel.

The look which was turned upon St. Peter,—that loving, longing, pitying glance,—is resting now upon us. The forgiveness which waited for him with the tender reproach, “Simon, son of Jonas,

lovest thou Me ?” which even sympathised with the weakness of affection, and added, “ Lovest thou Me more than these ?”—that forgiveness is still waiting to be bestowed upon us. The human trials, the human needs, oneness with which bound the heart of the apostle to his Lord, are still present to Christ. Because He is God He has not ceased to be man. Our wants, our pleasures, our hopes, our disappointments are as known to Him now, as were the sufferings and joys of St. Peter when he floated with Him on the waters of Gennesareth, or sat with Him on the green hills of Olivet. If we would love Him, we must go to Him with them. Not only our repentance, and our struggles, must be made known to Him ; but our cares, our wishes, our regrets. Then will He become the centre of our thoughts, and if of our thoughts, the centre also of our affections.

Once first in our hearts,—once truly the Lord of our whole being,—and human love will be what He intended it should be : it will brighten and hallow earth, but will never rob us of Heaven.

THE EVIDENCE OF TRUTH.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 63—65.

“ And the men that held Jesus mocked Him, and smote Him. And when they had blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face and asked Him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote Thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against Him.”

ON first reading the account of St. Luke, it does not seem clear whether the personal insults to our Lord were shown when St. Peter was present; but the other Gospels prove that they were. The sight of them must have greatly increased the Apostle's fears. And so also, we may imagine, that it added greatly to the Redeemer's sufferings to see one of His own Disciples at such a moment, afraid to offer even one glance of sympathy, and thinking of His personal comfort, when his Master was suffering the very extremity of provocation. For Christ stood helpless—whilst the fact of His Divinity was derided, and its assertion was turned into a cause of mockery.

Our Lord's feelings are always represented as essentially human; and, perhaps, there is nothing more intensely galling to a noble, human mind, than to be a witness to the assertion of an untruth

under any form. The love of truth is evidently a relic of the first sinless creation. It lies at the root of all goodness, and probably of all beauty. Truth is in fact harmony,—the perfect agreement of our opinions and our actions with some external standard. True doctrines are those which agree with the facts of the Divine Nature revealed to us in the Bible. True moral principles are those which are in unison with the Law of God given us by revelation, and written upon our hearts. Truth in word is the accordance of our words with the external circumstances or the internal feelings which they represent. It may be that beauty is but another form of truth, consisting in the agreement of the object represented with certain original laws of harmony and proportion existing in the Divine Mind.

And if truth be thus in its nature divine, how deep must have been the love of it in Him who first taught us to be conscious of it! When our Blessed Redeemer was blindfolded, and told to prophesy, the denial of His Divinity was involved in the fearful mockery, and it was this which formed its sting. And even the actual personal insult of the blow could not, we may believe, have been more bitter than the feeling of indignation which would be the natural result of the derisive doubt of His Omniscience.

For the power of the Divinity was then, as ever, present to Him. Even as He stood before them a helpless captive He was reading their

hearts. He was watching and scrutinizing the confused, maddening turmoil of thoughts in those who crowded around Him, even whilst they were taunting Him with the power which He could but would not exercise.

To a human being, like one of the prophets of old, the temptation would have been to comply with their mocking command, even for the very sake of truth. For we all know, if not by experience at least by intuition, what the trial is to have a doubt thrown upon our word,—to be aware that those who scorn us are deceived, and that we hold in our hands the means of confuting them,—and yet to be withheld from using those means. It is a temptation which few can bear, even in its lightest form. The common excuse given, if strength fails, is that it was impossible to endure it longer,—that we were forced to speak; and the aggravation of our situation is received as a sufficient apology.

We forget that “Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.”

And there must have been another circumstance in the trial adding to its severity. It must have been,—as “He who searcheth the heart” well knew,—a stumbling-block in the way of the affectionate but timid Apostle. St. Peter had much to learn from the teaching of the Holy Spirit before he could comprehend the passive submission shown by His Master because “His hour was come.” Doubtless

his faith wavered when he saw Him, whose Divinity he was just beginning to realize, refuse to give the proof which might at once have annihilated His enemies. The sight of His Lord's humiliation destroyed the last remaining element of courage, and he fell. Christ could have saved him, and yet He did not.

And so it is still. There are those who, like the Jew, seek "a sign from Heaven," and because God refuses to give it, plunge into unbelief. Perhaps the temptation is common to all keen-thinking minds. One more proof, one more miracle, one more unmistakable and personal testimony, we are apt to say, and then our doubts will be at rest! And God, who has already heaped miracle upon miracle, and testimony upon testimony, hides Himself from our cry, and because He does not answer, the weakness of our faith whispers to us that He cannot.

But if there is one fact more strongly evidenced than another to those who watch the dealings of God with man, as made known to us both by Revelation and by the ordinary workings of His Providence, it is that there are certain general laws of reason and experience, by the observance of which all truth must be obtained, and all right principles of action discovered; and that God *will* not in His Almighty wisdom vouchsafe to us any other. It may be,—it would seem to be,—that a departure from these laws is inconsistent with our condition of probation; and it is certain that if they were departed from, the concession to our weakness would

be useless. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." If we are only to be convinced by personal evidence, we require a personal miracle; and should the miracle be vouchsafed, it would affect only those who beheld it. If granted to others, it would soon cease to be a miracle, for it would become to us part of the ordinary course of nature.

Reason, from its universality, is, therefore, a much stronger guarantee of truth than any miracle can be; and the force of the early miracles lies not in the fact of their being miracles, but in their reasonableness. A Divine revelation required a Divine testimony; it was reasonable to expect it. Therefore, miracles were granted at the beginning. But as soon as the new revelation was established and recognized as Divine, the instrument for its transmission was reason, working through those general principles of historical evidence which are applicable to all ages. This does not do away with the collateral, and what may be termed the metaphysical evidence to the truth of Christianity. But such evidence cannot be the general foundation of intellectual belief, because it depends upon the peculiar theories and the moral constitution of each individual; and no man could rest his hopes of salvation upon a proof which, though accepted by one man, could be reasonably denied by another. God's witness is fact: Christianity is a fact. Let those who deny its divinity begin by first disproving

its origin. If it is not true, from whence did it arise?

Well will it be for all to remember that, granting the truth of Christianity, the question by which its rejectors will be judged at the Last Great Day will be, not whether they had all the evidence which they thought necessary to convince them of the divinity of the Revelation, but whether they accepted the truth of its facts upon that amount of reasonable evidence on which they received the ordinary witness of history. St. Peter was pardoned when his faith grew weak, for the full testimony to his Lord's divinity had not yet been given; but there will be no pardon for us.

PREJUDICE.

ST. LUKE, xxii. 66—71.

“AND as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led Him into their council, saying, Art Thou the Christ? tell us. And He said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe: and if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all, Art Thou then the Son of God? And He said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of His own mouth.”

HERE again is an illustration of the natural working of the human heart; something like thought and compunction arising as the dark excitement of night passes away, and the cold grey dawn of morning casts a chill over the passions as well as over the bodily frame. The difference between the view of events taken at night and that taken in the daytime is known and acknowledged universally; and every one who has experienced the effect of the early morning, must remember the dreariness which then creeps over the heart, either in deep sorrow, or after strongly-awakened feelings;—the sudden pause and questioning which the dull, faint light seems to force upon us;—the doubt how our

actions or our plans will be regarded by others ;— how we shall ourselves view them when looking back from amidst the business and pleasures of life. Without night one might almost imagine there would be no overwhelming energy either for good or evil. Without the cold dawn, no warning of prudence, no bitterness of repentance.

And so it seems that the chief priests and scribes, startled by the contrast between the vehemence of their passionate indignation against our Blessed Lord, and the coldness of that first awakening of nature, were induced to pause in their course, and, leading Him into the council, to ask, as though anxious to find some cause for relenting, “ Art Thou the Christ ? tell us.”

The answer was clear ; the warning which accompanied it most awful ; but their long-indulged enmity was too strong for the feeble visitings of compunction ; and the very words which should have terrified them to their salvation, were turned to the furtherance of their guilty schemes. “ Hereafter,” said Christ, “ shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God.” In this declaration was contained a fresh cause for fear. The Christ was in their eyes a temporal prince ; but Jesus spoke of Himself as far greater. Partly in terror, as it would appear, partly in anger, they all exclaimed, “ Art Thou then the Son of God ? ” And when the reply left no doubt, with the madness of determined guilt, acting the more fiercely because its course had for a moment been arrested,

they converted the words, spoken as a warning, into an occasion of accusation, and exclaimed, "What need we any further witness, for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth!"

The outcry was the result of prejudice—of a decision made before the case had been examined into. For the question which the chief priests were called upon to determine,—supposing the examination of our Lord to have been carried on according to the ordinary rules of justice,—was not what were the claims which He brought forward, but whether those claims were true. Pre-judging, pre-determining, they wilfully mistook their business,—made the very fact of the claim a sin,—and for that condemned him.

They were prejudiced. Prejudice is not considered a great offence, and it is a very common one. There are scarcely any of us who can say that we are entirely free from it. At times perhaps it shows itself in a way which, upon consideration, startles us. Passion occasionally induces us, in a measure, to sin actually in the same way as the chief priests. We feel, after an angry discussion, that we have perverted the words we have heard,—that we have hastily turned them into an accusation without cause; and our hearts reproach us; yet, upon the whole, we think very lightly of prejudice. As the chief priests grounded their condemnation of our Redeemer upon zeal for the glory of God, so do we base our condemnation of each other upon some imagined principle of truth

and equity. It is well for us to see what self-deception there may be in such a case,—to observe what these slight beginnings of evil lead to if not checked ; so perhaps shall we the more estimate and cultivate that quiet, calm-judging spirit, which, when based upon unselfishness, is one of the rarest endowments of the human character, as it is one of the most precious, both to ourselves and others.

The first pause in the morning, the first mis-giving, might have been sufficient to warn the enemies of Christ that they were suffering themselves to be led away by passionate prejudice ; and when we are condemning others, the whisper of conscience, which suggests a doubt whether our judgment is fair and upright, is a warning sent from God, that we have entered upon a dangerous course. If we neglect it, the next step will be not only prejudice in mind, but untruthfulness in words ; for untruth is the natural and necessary result of prejudice. What we have asserted we are tempted to prove to be correct ; and so again conscience is checked, and reason is silenced ; and following the guidance of our self-will, and too often of our passion, we persuade ourselves and probably induce others to accept a falsity as truth, and upon that to act.

Then follows a course of conduct, possibly consistent with our professed convictions, and apparently upright,—which we can justify fully to the world, and which we even venture to justify in the sight of God, but at the root of which lies that

worm of corruption, that root of never ending evil, a wilful falsity,—a result of prejudice which may God save us from! It eats into the very heart of love, and truth, and humility. If it does not lead us on to cry with the savage multitude, “Away with Him, away with Him,” yet it places us side by side with the wrathful priests, the cold-hearted Pilate, the mocking Herod, and bids us look upon goodness and call it wickedness, and listen to truth and convert it into sin.

Prejudice! Pre-judgment!—It crucified our Lord.

He dwells with us now by the presence of His church, the presence of our brethren, who are the members of His church. Well may we dread the possibility of allowing our prejudices so to blind us to the truth professed by them as to lead us to convert it into the accusation of falsehood.

There is indeed an opposite danger; it is possible so to admire, or rather, to think we admire, the absence of prejudice, as in the end to give up the profession of any definite belief,—to assert that truth exists everywhere, and therefore that it is to be found nowhere. And this danger it is, which makes many earnest-minded persons cling to their prejudices, believing that in them they are clinging to the only plank by which they can be saved from a fathomless gulf of unbelief. But to be truly unprejudiced does not in the least imply the absence of fixed principles and definite faith. If these principles and that faith are well grounded, we are

bound to defend them even unto death. We may not swerve one iota from the full profession of our belief; we may not sacrifice words, or compromise creeds, or give up the least portion of our moral principle. But as we stand firm upon our own rock of truth, so are we bound to look out upon the tossing billows of opinions around us, and acknowledge when others rest firm upon their rock also. It may indeed be distant from ours, and there may appear to be but small standing room upon it, but if it be a rock, a fragment of the Eternal Rock of Truth, we must, in so far as it is such, own and honour it.

The most unprejudiced minds, are those which have the firmest foundation for their own belief, for they only can afford to be unprejudiced. The candour and liberality of men who have no definite belief, is but another form of the deepest prejudice against those who have.

It is a rare gift, that of unprejudice, and many qualities are required for it. Caution, unselfishness, calmness, humility, a love of truth, which shall compel us to weigh all that may be said against our own opinion, a singleness of aim which shall lead us to seek the true point of opposition, and never depart from it under any temptation,—these are but moral virtues; they may exist apart from warmth of devotion, even, in some *rare cases*, apart from a true faith; but without them our devotion may become a dreamy enthusiasm, and our faith an ignorant fanaticism; and when the

secrets of our hearts are at last revealed to ourselves we may discover that whilst we were reckoning ourselves amongst Christ's faithful servants, we were in fact following the example of those who, under the cloak of reverence to their God, sent Him forth to death.

WEAKNESS.

ST. LUKE, xxxiii. 1—4.

‘ And the whole multitude of them arose, and led Him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a king. And Pilate asked Him, saying, Art Thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man.’

LOOKING at our Lord's trial again by the light of our own feelings it must strike us how intensely galling, we may perhaps even venture to say irritating, was the way in which it was conducted;—not merely unjustly, but inconsistently; one accusation being brought forward, and then another, so that there could be no power of defence;—and this inconsistency aggravated by the weakness which was one of the especial characteristics of the judge who presided at it. The sight of weakness must have been as trying to Christ as it is to us; for mankind are powerless against it, more powerless far than against strength, under whatever form it may exhibit itself. In strength there is an element of goodness which may be touched; in weakness there is none; and when it is allied with evil there is

nothing to stop its course. And thus we may suppose that our Blessed Saviour's cup of suffering would have been less bitter if His life had been assailed by the open fury of His avowed enemies, than it was when His death was meted out to Him, as it were by degrees, by the cold, vacillating, contemptible weakness of the Roman governor. Certainly, if contempt could have been excited in the Bosom of Him who knew and was about to pay the penalty of sin, it must have arisen in the mind of Christ, when He saw the miserable Pilate thus playing with justice; exciting what would have been false hopes in one who was not foreknowing, and then casting them aside, and yielding to the outcry of the mob, with the wretched self-deception that it was not his own act and deed.

And we ourselves, how do we feel towards Pilate? We do more than despise him. We shrink probably from his name; we shudder at the thought of his guilt. Does it never strike us how many, many times we have committed the same sin in a lighter form? Or perhaps not really lighter. For Pilate was a heathen, he knew nothing of the prophecies concerning our Lord, nothing of His history; he had scarcely heard, so it appears, of His miracles. The Saviour of the world stood before him like any other prisoner; there was therefore no wild rejection of Divine authority; and the accusation brought forward was only political; he had but to exercise the ordinary rules of justice, and he did exercise them; he examined, he arrived

at a right conclusion, and he owned his conclusion, only he was too weak to act either for or against it, and therefore he threw the decision upon circumstances. There is nothing strange in all this, nothing which we have not probably all experienced again and again. It required no demoniacal spirit of iniquity to follow such a course, for it is human, essentially human. Let us only search into our own hearts and we shall see that it is so.

Pilate was a conscientious man, conscientious, that is up to a certain point. If he had not been he would have delivered up our Lord at the first, in obedience to the clamour of His enemies. And we too are conscientious; at least there is scarcely one amongst us who will confess that he is not. Temptation comes before us, it may be, in some specious form. Kindheartedness or sympathy, or an avoidance of singularity, call upon us to adopt a certain line of conduct. We are not certain that we shall be right in so doing. Conscience indeed whispers that in all probability we shall be wrong, and we dare not act against conscience,—we should know no peace hereafter if we were to do so. We sit down therefore to examine into the question, and we endeavour to do so dispassionately. Perhaps we even pray to be guided to a right determination,—nothing can in appearance be more upright and sincere than our intentions and our conduct. Conscience is silenced; but—we scarcely perceive it, yet we might do so if we examined our hearts closely,—it is only stilled, rendered dumb as it were; it does

not speak loudly in approval—and why is this? In the fulness of our self-satisfaction we have overlooked our will, we have not inquired whether we are bent upon following the higher or the lower will. Having mistaken *wishing* for willing,—and there is a *vast* distinction between the two,—we have not asked whether, if reason and conscience decide against inclination, we are resolved, whatever may be the sacrifice, to act upon that decision. The two wills, therefore, are left vacillating, and so the inquiry begins. At its close we see clearly that we have but one course to adopt,—the object of our desire must be relinquished. And we say to our conscience that it shall be so. Only,—our weak will, our higher will,—it does not give us strength to flee, it can but wish, and we do not strive to increase its power by prayer. So we stand and gaze; we think and argue; always, perhaps, arriving at the same conclusion, and thus stilling any remonstrances of conscience, but taking no active steps to remove from the temptation, the strength of which, unknown to ourselves, increases whilst we linger. At length our higher will yields, possibly so little that we do not perceive that it is yielding, but, profiting by that momentary weakness, self-deception steps in to strengthen the lower will and bid us rush forward boldly into sin. We say that we must yield, because we have unfortunately in some way committed ourselves, and cannot draw back. We have only a choice of evils, we must submit to the opinion of others, or, in fact

—it is the common every day excuse,—we cannot help ourselves.

And we cannot—it is then too late; but there is no excuse in the force of circumstances, no justification to be found in the apparent necessity. If we had been firmly bent upon obeying the higher will before the question was considered, there would have been no dallying with temptation when it was decided. If Pilate had been upright in will before he commenced our Lord's examination, he would not have been weakly cruel when it was ended. The result of such a sin is not always very evident, and therefore it may be the more dangerous. For there is no necessary falling away into greater sin because of this one wrong step. On the contrary, the very uneasiness we feel may make us more careful to act rightly in our wrong path. But we cannot make it otherwise than wrong. We may justify it to ourselves, we may deaden memory and silence conscience, and call upon the world to approve our nobleness, and self-denial, and honourable principle. But "that which is crooked cannot be made straight." We may pass through life, and lie down in death, without once daring to face the fact that we have been self-deceivers; but the unrepented sin which is buried with us in our graves has in it the germ of indestructibility, even like that which shall hereafter cause our bodies to spring forth, and at the Last Great Day it will assuredly rise again and confront us, to our shame, at the Bar of the All-seeing God.

No,—there is but one way by which those who have wandered into a wrong path and find themselves unable to retrace their errors, can ever make it right, and that is not merely by watchfulness for the future, but by honest, deep repentance for the past. Without that,—without boldly confronting the fact that we have sinned,—there can be no sincerity of purpose ; and without sincerity our life can be but a perplexing mockery, a profession of single-mindedness when our heart is double.

“ Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.”

RESPONSIBILITY.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 5—7.

“ And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.”

How Pilate shrank from decision,—from choice, and responsibility ! And what a common, natural feeling that is ! scarcely, at first sight, evil, and certainly allied to good ; for there may be in it humility, deference to others, even tenderness of conscience, and a fear of doing harm by our ignorance and mistakes. Yet there is, perhaps, no feeling which leads to greater sins of omission, and certainly none which is a more fruitful source of self-deception.

Anything to avoid the responsibility consequent upon decision ! We will not determine what we will do in doubtful cases, or such as seem to us doubtful ; we turn to others less scrupulous than ourselves, and then, when the point is settled by their actions, say we did not decide it and are not answerable for it : and so the act passes from our memory.

Yet, one day, these forgotten responsibilities will awake again, and we shall then see, if we have never seen before, that to say we are not responsible, is, in all cases in which the power of choice is given us, to assert a falsehood.

For what we are all apt to forget, as regards responsibility, is, that we are but accepting it under another form when we allow the actions of others to determine our own.

There are, indeed, cases in which we speak as though men were not responsible; but when we inquire into the meaning of our words, we shall find that although we are using an ordinary mode of expression, we are not by any means expressing a fact. A soldier, it is said, has no choice, and therefore is not responsible when he carries out the orders of his superior; and a child is not responsible when he follows the commands of his parent; and generally speaking, the individuals of a nation are not considered responsible when they obey the laws of the government. But in all these cases the non-responsibility has a limit. Even in the strongest case, that of a child and a parent, there is a superior law—a law by which the child must, in the exercise of its free will, be guided; and in the choice of obedience, or resistance to this highest law, responsibility will at last be found to exist. For instance: if a parent commands his son to commit murder, the command does not in the slightest degree diminish the son's responsibility should he obey. The parent's law is binding on him; be-

cause God has said "Honour thy father and thy mother;" but God has also said "Thou shalt do no murder." The power of choice between these two commands still rests with the child; and according to the choice will he be judged.

Still more is this so in other cases. In the weakness and misery of indecision we may give ourselves up to what is called the force of events; or, folding our hands refuse to act at all, because we are afraid of acting wrongly. But we have but hidden from ourselves the choice and the responsibility which are inseparable from free-will. The law of God still stands over us, and if that law bids us act, we break it just as much by refusing to do so, as by acting wrongly. For if necessity exists, it is only, so far as our experience teaches us, in the theories of metaphysicians, which are contradicted by the universal practice of mankind; and it is only necessity which can release any human being—man, woman, or child—capable of reason, from the burden of responsibility in every action of life.

It is surely then the part of wisdom to accept and confront a fact which meets us in every claim of duty, and boldly, yet humbly and trustfully, to shape our course through life accordingly. Responsibility we must have. Education, therefore, whether it concerns ourselves or others, must be based upon the recognition of this truth, if it is ever to produce results useful to man or acceptable to God. Submission and obedience are duties

urgent and imperative; especially in children; but they are so because God enjoins them; and they are binding so far, and so far only, as they are in accordance with the eternal attributes of the Deity—justice, mercy, truth, and purity. Doubtless, indeed, there is in the exercise of obedience, even without reference to its object, much that is valuable. Humility, self-denial, and self-control, may be, and generally are, involved in it; but the obligation of obedience does not *rest* upon its moral benefit, but upon the command of God: and therefore it is that obedience to parents is a higher duty than obedience to a self-chosen guide. If, in the process of education, we inculcate obedience as a virtue in itself, without reference to the limits ordained by God for its exercise, we may be training a child well and wisely for the present moment, but we are not fitting it for the responsibilities of life. Such a child may hang upon our words and follow our footsteps, and by our watchfulness be kept from all outward evil; but having never been taught the duty of exercising its own free will, and thus consciously accepting its own responsibility, it will, in all probability, when our influence is removed, throw itself helplessly under the control of the stronger minds with which it may come in contact; and from thenceforth, whether its course be for good or for evil, it will be borne onwards, without fixed purpose, whilst struggling with that tremendous power of a weak will which is the Devil's chief agent in

hurrying us along the downward road of destruction.

And as it is with a child, so it is with ourselves; for we are all children, all weak, and the best among us tempted to shrink from responsibility in the serious affairs of life. And if in dealing with a child our aim should be to awaken it to the necessity of responsibility, even in the very act of obedience, by teaching it that obedience is submission to God's law, and therefore the choice of good in preference to evil, so should it be in our own self-government. To shrink from such a necessity is not humility but faithlessness!

Who are we that we are to tremble at the prospect of any duty when God sees fit to appoint it? Have we indeed no help? are we really left alone, to wander, as best we may, through the intricacies of life's tangled wilderness, with no guiding post to direct us, no light to cheer us, no arm to uphold us?—He who gave us the power of choice, He who has made it so indestructible that the most imperative human law and the most abject spirit of weakness can never annihilate it, has He not promised His aid, His Spirit, Himself, to be our Guide? The precious gift which makes us living souls and not machines cannot be intended only as a snare to lead us to our ruin.

False and miserable is the thought, for it is the suggestion of the Tempter, and if we obey it, it will work our destruction in two ways.

It will burden our consciences with sins of com-

mission—by preventing us from making a positive choice of right in preference to wrong, and thus rendering us partakers in the guilt of that wrong.

And it will lead us to sins of omission—by making us dread to attempt what we believe to be our duty, lest in assuming the responsibility of choice we should in the end be proved to have been in error. The latter may seem the lesser evil of the two now ; perhaps it will not appear to be so hereafter. Or rather they cannot be separated. That is the point which we are called upon to remember. “He that is not with Me is against Me.” He that does not do all the good he can, does evil. He who does not decide for the right, decides for the wrong.

Choice ! We cannot too often remind either ourselves, or those we attempt to guide, that it is a necessity ;—and that it only remains with ourselves to make it a duty. We laugh at children when they tell us they do not know what to choose,—they cannot tell which thing they like best. Perhaps we should act more wisely if we were to urge upon them the importance of choice. To know our own minds, as it is called, is often a very difficult task as we grow old ; it might not be so if we had been trained to know them from our childhood. And it would surely be no slight acquisition ; for to know our own minds, to understand what we wish, and why we wish ; or why—as is often the case—we hold our wishes suspended ; would through God’s grace assist us to walk through life clearly

and steadfastly, to have a single heart, a single intention. It is a knowledge essential to a peaceful conscience, and inseparable from the highest aims of duty. When we compel ourselves to choose, however unimportant may be the matter in which choice is exercised, we are assisting ourselves in obtaining this clearness of spiritual insight. There are cases in which to know what we wish to choose may save us from sin in the actual choice. At all events, it will save us from the wretched infatuation of throwing the burden of our choice upon another, or of believing that because we will not openly take the part of the wicked, we are excused if we fail to take the part of the good; not seeing,—or, if we do see, wilfully forgetting,—that, like Pilate in the act of making the lesser choice, we are in fact rendering ourselves responsible for the greater.

THE LUXURIES OF RELIGION.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 8.

“And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad; for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because He had heard many things of Him: and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him.”

THE various characters in Scripture are very strongly marked by the slightest touches. Pilate and Herod are so different, and yet each so true to the experience of human nature! Herod at once shows himself to have advanced farther than Pilate in wickedness. He has passed the feeling of awe. Our Lord's miracles are nothing to him but a source of amusement, an exhibition as of the tricks of magic. “He hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him.” So he would also have hoped to be interested by any strange phenomenon of nature, or any display of art. Many degrees of hardness of heart had he attained since the first rumours of the Redeemer's supernatural power reached him, and drew from him the exclamation, “This is John the Baptist—he is risen from the dead.” Conscience then was comparatively tender. The remembrance of his guilt was fresh in his mind. Possibly he might at that time

have been awakened to repentance; but he was a prince, living in luxury, surrounded by flatterers; the means of stifling conscience were ready at hand. Still, yielding up himself to self-indulgence, he felt, but he did not act. And the Divine Teacher, who, if he had then sent for Him, might have "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," and in mercy have saved his soul, was never seen until time had gone by, and memory, perhaps, had become dulled, and conscience was deadened; and the rumour of a miracle, instead of arousing him to penitence and self-condemnation, was received but with the mocking curiosity of one who had exhausted all other sources of excitement.

The character of such a man seems far removed from the ordinary sinfulness of private life, in a country and a state of society like our own; but the steps towards its formation are easily taken. To see, and hear, and feel, without acting, that is the beginning.

And there are many shades of such a disposition to be found amongst us. Herod had no bitter enmity against our Lord. He appears to have been simply indifferent; only he would have made the exhibition of a sacred power the medium through which he indulged an excited curiosity. That sin, if we inquire deeply, will probably come home to us much more than we could at first imagine. What is it to make religion the cloke for the indulgence of our love of beauty or harmony? To attend

religious service, *because* we like the music?—to follow after celebrated preachers, *because* it gratifies curiosity?—to worship in particular churches, *because* the architecture approves itself to our taste?—to read religious books, *because* they are talked about?—to discuss religious subjects, *because* they happen to be the fashionable topics of the day? Doubtless there is pleasure and interest in all these things—a natural and, to a certain extent, an innocent pleasure; so, also, there must have been a pleasure,—a very exciting and overpowering, and also innocent pleasure,—in witnessing our Lord's miracles, quite apart from any recognition of His Divinity. But the very possibility of a Divine interference with the laws of nature would, to a rightly constituted mind, have brought thoughts so awful, that any lesser feeling of interest would have been crushed by it; and if we,—Christians as we profess ourselves, the redeemed children of God,—really recognised the value of all things connected with religion, every thought of mere pleasure would at once be absorbed by the ever-present consciousness of the importance of the interests connected with it.

Sacred things must be treated sacredly; if they are not they become profane. And the fact that religion can and does minister to the gratification of our tastes is a reason why, when we discover in ourselves the existence of such tastes, we should sternly and rigidly set a watch over our hearts, and keep a guard over our lives, lest the beauty which

ministers to our feelings of pleasure should at the same time deaden our hearts.

When we make religion a luxury, we have very great cause to doubt whether it is the religion of Christ. It may seem a harsh saying,—yet it does not in the least imply that there is no luxury in religion,—that beauty, eloquence, harmony, are sinful. But it does not imply that the way of the Cross is not a way of self-pleasing, but a path of self-denial and self-discipline; and that although God, in His bounteous mercy, smooths it for us, and whilst we are following the straight course of duty, sends us many pleasures, yet, that we are to wait for His sending, and not to seek for them ourselves. Much less are we to repine because they are not granted us. Many persons there are with an intense appreciation of sacred beauty, whose lot is cast in a sphere quite removed from its enjoyment. This dispensation of God's Providence, perhaps, seems hard to them; they see blessings conferred lavishly upon some who do not even recognise them as such; whilst they, to whom even a portion would be an inestimable boon, are deprived of them. But these circumstances are ordered by laws infinitely more wise, more merciful, and tender than we can understand. The taste for *spiritual luxuries* does not at all prove that they would be good for us—often the reverse. The plant fostered in the greenhouse may sink under the exhaustion of its unnatural growth; whilst that which has been exposed to the open air has a strength to

withstand the fiercest storms. And so in our own case. When our strength has been attained without the aids of the external excitements of religion, then God may, perhaps, see fit to bestow them upon us as blessings.

For they are blessings—great and deeply to be prized; but only when they meet us in the course of duty. And if, as is sometimes the case, we are called upon to decide ourselves whether we may seek them, this rule of duty,—apart from the enjoyment, or even the benefit, we believe we may derive from them,—will be our safest guide. The indulgence of taste and feeling may lead us astray—the effort to follow duty never can. We need not shrink from so stern a law. Herod sought, from curiosity, to witness the miracles of Christ, and the Saviour of the world stood before him apparently powerless. The disciples followed their Master in humble devotion, and in their presence the blind were made to see, and the lame to walk, the sick were healed, and the dead raised to life. And Christ has miracles of love still for those who follow Him in duty. There may be no visible temples adorned with the work of men's hands in which to worship, yet the prayers offered in the secret heart will be answered by the visitation of God's Spirit. The tones of earthly harmony may be silent, but the Voice of the Comforter will speak soothingly and sweetly to the conscience: and when, as may often happen, God does at length vouchsafe to send us, even on earth, those external aids—

the beauty and the melody which He vouchsafes to accept as offerings for His outward service—there will be no misgiving in our enjoyment. Thoughts of vanity and excitement will no more throng us, marring our sacrifice of devotion; the pleasure which God gives will be accepted at once from His Hand, and consecrated and deepened by His Blessing; the earthly element in our worship will be hallowed, and the luxury of religion will be felt to be, what God intended it, the foretaste of the blessedness of Heaven.

SOCIETIES AND ASSOCIATIONS.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 10—12.

“ And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. And Herod with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together : for before they were at enmity between themselves.”

THE Scripture narratives are unlike all others in the way in which events are told,—put in juxtaposition, and the inference left to be gathered from the sense of the passage. That appears to be the mode of God’s dealings with man generally, both in nature and revelation. The discoveries of science are simply the reading of those facts which God has placed before our eyes,—drawing from their position and circumstances their true intention and the laws by which they are governed. Men always think it necessary to point their own moral, to interpret their own actions ; but God, having placed His works and His actions before us, and given us reason and conscience by which to judge them, leaves with us the responsibility of exercising those faculties, and will hereafter judge us according to the manner in which we have used this responsi-

bility. Possibly this consideration might lessen our astonishment when we find that the truths of revelation do not convey the same lesson to all; that to one "they are the savour of death unto death, to another the savour of life unto life." They who have learnt to read the wonderful lessons of the Bible, imagine that others, when it is placed before them, must necessarily do the same. They forget that the key must be found before the treasure can be unlocked. How often, for instance, we may have read the few verses in St. Luke, giving the account of our Lord's being dragged before Herod, without in the least understanding what a volume in the history of human nature is contained in the words—"the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together!"—friends because they were associates in guilt; the weak man resting upon the wickedness of the strong, the strong, finding in that association what the last lingering of conscience must have required—an opiate in the co-operation of one whom he felt to be less depraved than himself.

Probably even then neither of them contemplated the idea of our Lord's death. Pilate, it is evident wished to save Him; and Herod's mockery was different from that of the Chief Priests,—not so cruel and bitter, having in it less of personal enmity;—it was the mockery of scepticism rather than of rage. But it did the same work. The vacillation of Pilate was strengthened by the scoff of Herod; and the end was, that whilst both acknowledged

the innocence of Christ, both, so far as in them lay, delivered Him to death.

Something of a similar kind—the strength of mutual support in evil—is often to be seen amongst ourselves. For it would appear to be a law of human nature that the moral strength of individual conscience is lessened by the very co-operation which seems at first sight likely to increase it. There is a common proverb which, like all proverbs, condenses the experience of generations,—“A corporate body has no conscience;” and this arises from the fact that the element of goodness, the power of conscience, which,—working in each separately, might lead to acts of nobly integrity,—when shared in common with many, ceases to operate; and men who might by themselves have been merciful, considerate, and scrupulous, when acting in concert with others, become reckless in their wickedness and cruelty. The actors in the French Revolution were not demons, though they did the work of demons; they were merely men with ordinary passions, whose conscience was deadened by the support and influence of other men.

There is an important lesson to be learned from this—the necessity of standing alone; not judging, indeed, or acting, or deciding alone, but in our daily life, and in our self examination, standing before ourselves as we shall each one hereafter stand at the Great Judgment-seat,—alone,—beneath the Eye of our Maker.

For we must remember that the sentence which

is to be passed upon us then will have no respect to the plausible excuses of men. Pilate leaned upon Herod, and Herod satisfied his conscience by the co-operation of Pilate; but the Roman Governor was answerable as the murderer of Jesus; and the scoffing king was guilty as the mocker of One whom he believed to be superhuman. And so in like manner—the hard judgment, the cold-hearted neglect, the weak yielding to external pressure, which each member of a society casts from himself as an individual, and lays at the door of *all*, are, nevertheless, his own, and he must one day answer for them.

By accepting evil we make it ours; the very act of consenting to it shows that the ruling power has yielded. But good, on the contrary, may be effected without will, or even with a contrary will. What we do merely because others do it; because we are in a position which prevents our escape; out of fear of the censure of those who labour with us; is no willingly good action; it may be, so far as we are concerned, a very bad one. The amount of good effected has no necessary relation to the motive which caused it; but the amount of evil has. A murder committed by the sentence of a corporate body brings the guilt of murder to each individual,—the greatness of the crime being a call to awaken each separate conscience; but an act of mercy carried out with the approval of a corporate body is only so far the act of each individual as his will and effort have been concerned in it.

There may be a practical application of this thought. The present age is peculiarly the age of societies,—associations for good. We are all probably more or less mixed up with them; some there are whose lives seem passed in a vortex of the occupation which they bring; they are in a state of constant exertion and anxiety; their work is never-ceasing, their plans are endless; the amount of good they effect is unquestionably very considerable. Who shall blame them? None. Especially none who sit at ease in their quiet, self-indulgent homes, shrinking from effort, and amusing themselves, as they think, innocently, because—not willingly neglecting, but only—not *seeing*, Lazarus lying at their door. Yet for the best and most earnest-minded of those whose existence seems thus devoted to their fellow-creatures, it must be very good, and infinitely needful, to retire at times into the wilderness—the wilderness and solitude of their own being,—and there to view it apart—alone.

Before the Tribunal of God, what place is to be found for societies and associations?—who will wear the crown of their glory?—who will bear the punishment of their sins? Well indeed will it be for us all if, before that awful Judgment shall overtake us, we face the question boldly, and answer it fully and conscientiously.

The result of such an inquiry may strip us of much that we have thought honourable; it may lead us to see a deadly evil where all seemed bright and pure; it may make us less ready to thrust our-

selves into publicity, and teach us to shrink from the flattering words which once were so sweet to our ears. But if it bring us Truth, we shall have cause to accept it thankfully, even though the gift be purchased at the price of the lowest humiliation.

Voluntary associations for mutual support and joint action are in themselves earthly, and, however necessary and useful, must, as such, embody the weakness and the temptations of earth. We know of no associations in Heaven—except that by which the angels fell. The sacred Society which, we have reason to believe, may be destined hereafter to take their place, is no association,—it is a Kingdom, subject to the law of One Head, owning no authority but that of One Ruler. So far as our goodness is dependent upon association, so far it is worthless. So far as our sin is, in our own sight, excused by it, so far we are living in a state of most miserable and dangerous self-deception.

At the close of that day which witnessed the agony and the death of the Redeemer, Pilate and Herod were friends, bearing between them the burden of a crime which they had striven to lessen by participation.

At the close of that long day of Time, which is to bring woe and destruction upon the earth, they will be recognised,—bearing each the crushing weight of his own sin,—and each to hear his separate sentence either of condemnation or of pardon for Eternity.

PARTIAL GOODNESS.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 13—15.

‘ And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people : and, behold, I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse Him : no, nor yet Herod : for I sent you to him ; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto Him.”

THERE is a pause in the hurried turmoil of our Saviour’s trial at this time,—a moment of peace, in which, humanly speaking, He might have been saved, and Pilate might have spared himself the heavy guilt of His innocent blood. So it is often with us all ; when hurrying onwards wilfully in a course which we know to be evil, God gives us in mercy, a breathing space, an interval for thought. It may be useful to observe what use Pilate made of this mercy. The first thing which strikes us is his calmness, his dispassionate reasoning, the manner in which he collects the different points bearing on our Lord’s innocence, and puts them together, so as, it would seem, to force conviction upon the minds of the people. Jesus, he reminds them, had been examined publicly, the crimes which had been

urged against Him could not be proved ; there was, in fact, "no fault in Him touching these things." And this was not merely Pilate's own opinion ; it had been concurred in by Herod, a king certainly not likely to look leniently upon one who was perverting the people. Something, indeed, had been permitted which might appear like punishment. Christ had been treated with mockery (for this was evidently on Pilate's mind), but nothing which had passed before Herod had proved him to be "worthy of death." Such is the summing up of the Roman governor. As we read his words we may imagine ourselves listening to the cool, dispassionate, intelligent words of one of the judges of our own land. Our reason and our feeling alike approve. We are thrown off our guard ; our opinion of the judge is raised ; and even now,—after the lapse of so many years ; in spite of the traditionary horror which the name of Pilate inspires, in defiance of the almost unearthly associations of dread connected with him, we can scarcely peruse thoughtfully the account of our Redeemer's trial, without wondering from whence this terror and this aversion have arisen, and perhaps questioning with ourselves whether it may not be unjust.

Yet, let us think again. Calmness, impartiality, a dispassionate judgment, are unquestionably excellences in any character. Yet it appears evident, when we examine human nature, that any one quality, however valuable, when taken alone, will degenerate into evil. A balance between two good

motives, a course between two true principles, seems essential to right action and right feeling. Pilate could reason and judge, but he could not feel; he had no impulses, he was utterly wanting in what may be called the spirit of chivalry, Weakness could not touch him, injustice could not rouse him, and therefore it was that his reason became folly, and his prudence madness. But was he answerable for this? He came into the world with the bias of his mind in one direction; he was born with certain characteristics; the physical temperament by which his moral character was chiefly moulded was governed by certain laws over which he had no control. If, then, he only carried out the natural condition of his being, if he did only what his nature told him to do, why was he to blame?

That question, touching as it does upon a point which has been the perplexity of man from the beginning of the creation, and which will be so till the end of time, will be best answered by another. Why is one man born prudent, cautious, and cold, a blessing to his fellow-creatures, whilst another is a curse? Why is an impulsive, excitable temperament, in one man, the germ of a life of saintliness, and in another of a life of sin? If all cold and cautious men were indifferent and hard-hearted,—if all excitable men were given up to the indulgence of their passions,—we might say that there was a necessity in their nature, and consequently an excuse. But the fact that the same

temperaments in different persons produce different results, shows that there is no necessity.

We look at Pilate as he was when, summoned by the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, he recounted the proofs of our Redeemer's innocence, and then delivered Him over to death ; and we forget that the cold and cruel judge must once have been the intelligent, quiet-minded boy, whose powers of discrimination were, probably, the delight of his parents, and whose worldly success might have been prophesied from the prudence and self-control of his youth. Judging from all that we know of Pilate, there could have been nothing in his original character to prevent his bearing to all generations a name as honoured as that of Aristides, the Just, or Phocion, the Incorruptible. He who, in the face of a furious mob, in the presence of the exasperated priests, could so calmly recount the facts which it must have been so irritating to them to hear, could have been no abject slave to physical fear ; and in his own eyes, doubtless, he was the most impartial and merciful of judges. But his character was one-sided—it wanted the true balance ; and for the consequences of that defect, and the sins it occasioned, he was answerable.

One-sided ! feeling, thinking, seeing only in one way, and that the way congenial to our natural temperament ! It does not seem a sin, it does not seem possible that it should produce such monstrous evil.

But let us not deceive ourselves. Our Saviour's command is, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father, which is in heaven, is perfect." Perfection is utterly incompatible with one-sidedness; and our difficulty, and consequently our work, lies in the completion of our natural deficiency. The characteristics with which we are born are to be checked; the qualities in which we fail are to be acquired; and the first knowledge, therefore, which it is essential to us to obtain, is the knowledge of *ourselves*, our natural virtues, and our natural faults. To say this is to repeat a truism. But which of us acts upon it? Why does the warm-hearted boy become the selfish sensualist? Because he indulges his warm-heartedness till it becomes sin. Why does the generous child grow up into the reckless spendthrift? Because he fosters his generosity till he cannot perceive that it has become a selfish indulgence. Why does the careful youth prove the avaracious old man? Because he cherishes his carefulness, and never asks whether there is any opposing principle which has a claim to his allegiance. Why does the prudent, reasoning, thoughtful boy become the mean and, at length, cruel coward? Because he makes an idol of his prudence, and believes that, in worshipping it, he is both following the dictates of reason and the commands of God. That one quality upon which we pride ourselves—of that let us beware. As

light is formed by the union of all colours, so perfection is formed by the union of all virtues. God grant us to see this, that we may never fall, as so many have fallen,—fatally, irretrievably, —even by that which is most precious in us.

EXPEDIENCY.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 16—19.

“I will therefore chastise Him, and release Him. (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas : (who, for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison).”

“ I WILL therefore chastise Him, and release Him.” A little was yielded in the hope that much might be saved. The consequence was, what the universal history of mankind teaches us to expect—the loss of all. “ They cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas.” They might have been awed by firmness ; but the least sign of yielding roused their fierce passions to the wildest pitch.

The Jews were to Pilate what our passions are to us ; and as he dealt with the Jews, so do we too often deal with our temptations. To sin wilfully is the guilt of comparatively few—to sin under the guise of ignorance and good intentions, is the guilt, more or less, of us all.

Pilate was well intentioned : he was desirous

of saving our Blessed Lord—but not earnestly—not at all hazards. There he deceived himself; and his first action proved it. If Jesus was without fault, why was He not at once set free? Why was He to be first chastised? Uprightness, sincerity of purpose, and real strength of mind know no compromise with injustice—no dallying with evil. If Christ was not guilty, to punish Him was sin. But Pilate did not wish to avoid all sin; he only wished to avoid it in its extreme form. His grand principle was expediency. He desired to be just, and he persuaded himself that he could best attain his end by a slight injustice.

He would, on no account, on his own responsibility, have sentenced our Redeemer to death; but his sincerity went no further. That which he desired was merely to save himself from the reproaches of conscience, and the possible condemnation of the world. He feared evil, but he did not love good. There is a great gulf between those two states of mind—a gulf so narrow, that they who stand on the opposing brinks may appear to be side by side;—so deep that God only can fathom it now, and Heaven and Hell only will teach us to fathom it hereafter. Yet Pilate had at least a plausible excuse for his conduct; as he had no personal interest in our Lord's destruction, it could have been no personal enmity which induced him to propose a lesser form of punishment.

And evil as is the sound of expediency, there are cases in which it is but another name for that wisdom of the serpent which is compatible with the harmlessness of the dove. But expediency, it must be remembered, can never make right that which in itself is wrong. To punish an innocent person, let the punishment be never so light, was an injustice; and if the happiness of millions could have been purchased by it, the act ought not to have been committed. Expediency, which chooses between different forms of innocent actions, is perfectly allowable; expediency, which chooses even the slightest form of an action which is not innocent, is absolutely inadmissible. And it was in this that the doubleness of Pilate's heart betrayed itself. With the professed intention of doing right he allowed himself to do wrong; and, the act once committed, he was no longer master of the consequences. In his miserable weakness he had owned our Lord to be, in a measure, guilty, and the fury of the people seized upon the acknowledgment, and converted it into that fiercer cry for death to which he at length yielded.

There is probably a tale, as sad, to be told of each one of us;—the history of a time when we have stood gazing afar upon some sinful deed, listening to the wild clamour of our passions, or the solicitations of those who call themselves our friends. We have, it may be, professed to resist the temptation; we have reasoned against it; we

have strengthened ourselves by arguments ; but at length, as we have stood, gazing, thinking, resolving—yet unable to flee—the thought has arisen :—what, if we could satisfy ourselves and others, by a slight yielding,—by that amount of concession which shall save us from the commission of the actual offence ? Is there any need to recall the rest ? God help us to bear the remembrance of the rapid, almost instantaneous, downfall ; the increased concentrated power of the evil within us ; the mocking force with which the tempter hurries us forward, bidding us look back helplessly at our lost resolution, even in the very act of following him wilfully : and then the cold, heart-sickening, paralysing shock of finding ourselves suddenly—where but a few moments before we had thought it impossible we could ever be—at Satan's side ; having leaped the gulf and entered upon the road that ends in destruction.

O ! let us be true to ourselves. Real abhorrence of sin can tamper with it under no form ; it dreads that which looks like it ; it keeps far away from it ; it knows that in times of great temptation—perhaps it may be said in every temptation—the least compromise is destruction ; it feels that all which is lost on one side is gained on the other ; that exactly in proportion as reason and conscience waver, the strength of passion grows mightier ; and that thus—by steps few and fearful in their rapidity,—the temptation which but a moment before appeared so slight as scarcely to require an

exertion to resist it, becomes overwhelming and irresistible.

Even if it were not so,—if we could escape outwardly unscathed from the furnace of temptation; if we were assured of victory, and could venture to the extremest verge of the act of sin, and retreat, conquerors over ourselves; should we really be justified in our boldness, or have cause to triumph in our victory? Christ, our merciful Lord, our loving Master, what does He ask of us? A heart that has proffered its allegiance to him, and yet sighed longingly for the service of another? A mind tainted by thoughts of the evil which it trembled to commit? A love so little worth that it can dwell with pleasure upon the things which He hates? Be it that He will accept it,—be it that, in His wondrous mercy, He will look upon our weakness with compassion, on our coldness with forgiveness, on our treachery with forbearance. Are we Christians? are we even men—human beings capable of generosity, of devotion, of self-sacrifice;—and can we bear to offer such a heart for His acceptance?

Let us turn once more to Pilate. Had he been saved from that extremest form of sin which he committed when delivering up our Lord to His enemies, can we think that he would, therefore, have been numbered amongst Christ's friends? Loyalty and obedience lie in the will; and thousands there are whose wills are treacherous, though treachery will never in this world be laid to their

account. If we would know whether we are amongst the number, let us ask ourselves whether we seek goodness in the way of goodness; or whether, like Pilate, we follow Satan in doing evil, whilst we satisfy ourselves by believing that we shall thereby be the better enabled to follow Christ.

CIRCUMSTANCES.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 20—23.

“Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him: I will therefore chastise Him, and let him go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that He might be crucified: and the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed.”

THE cry, “Crucify Him, crucify Him,” sounds like the howl of an infuriated animal, and Pilate’s answer in return, like the gentle expostulation of human reason,—as superior as the soul of man is to the instinct of the brute. And doubtless, Pilate felt it to be so. He must have prided himself upon his own uprightness, the willingness which he felt to be just; for injustice is allowed, even by heathens, to be one of the most glaring of all offences; being as it always must be, a form of untruth; and truth lying at the very foundation of morality. And if any man could ever have found justification in the force of circumstances for yielding to the temptation to be unjust, Pilate was that man. He stood as the governor of a rebellious people, who were clamouring for what they

called an act of deserved punishment. The clamour was supported,—more than supported,—it had been originated by their rulers. The offences alleged, though disproved so far as they regarded any political crime, were nevertheless of a mixed nature; referring to laws and customs which were all important to the Jews, though indifferent to the Romans. To have refused to acquiesce in the demand for punishment, would in all probability (so Pilate might have argued) have been to create an insurrection; to bring a certain evil upon hundreds, for the sake of an uncertain good to one; since who could say that in the tumult excited by disappointment, the life of Christ would not at all events have been sacrificed. All this, and much more, Pilate might have said for himself; and we may say it for him, and then turn to ourselves. If we had been in the same position, how should we have acted? We may judge by inquiring how in our past lives we have acted; or even perhaps, as truly, how we now judge of those actions.

Looking back on the course of events, do we decide upon the right or wrong of our career by the abstract rule of God's law, or by what we call the force of circumstances.

Pilate, by his weakness, taught the people to cry "Crucify Him, crucify Him;" and then in that cry,—in the circumstances which he had himself created,—found the excuse for his sin. Are we sure that we never do likewise? If we do, let us remember that, humanly speaking, there are no such

things as circumstances,—if by that term, we mean events independent of man's will,—except in the ordering of God's works and His dealings in nature. All other circumstances are in reality the effect of our own actions, or the actions of others. We may indeed be so placed as to fall into misfortune by the fault of persons with whom we have no concern, and we may then have a right to say that we are under the control of circumstances, and must be guided by them; but if that fault can in the slightest degree be laid to our own charge, if it be the result of our own thoughtlessness, or indolence, or neglect, we deceive ourselves fatally, when we look upon ourselves as martyrs, and say we are overwhelmed by unfortunate circumstances.

And as with the past, so with the present, and the future. God, if we may so say without irreverence, places in the hands of every human being a certain amount of material, leaving it to the will of man to shape it into the best form he may. He gives to one riches, to another poverty; He surrounds one with friends, He leaves another solitary and desolate; He places one within reach of good education, He stations another where none is to be obtained without effort; and from the manner in which these varied original circumstances are used and developed, others arise. But these secondary circumstances are our own. We have no more right—so far as our actions have influenced them—to attribute them to Providence, than Pilate had a right to attribute to the same irresistible Power

the clamour of the Jewish multitude excited by his own weakness. To be governed by circumstances is therefore too often in other words to be governed by the consequences of our own sins and follies, and the sins and follies of others; it is to put ourselves at the mercy of every change in other men's wills, and to follow whatever path they point out; forgetting that life is like a kaleidoscope, of which our own actions form part; and that in the act of moving, or even standing still whilst others move, we assist in creating the very combination of events which we afterwards look upon as beyond our power, and therefore sent by God to guide us.

No.—God does not lead us through the intricate labyrinth of this world by the clue of circumstances, but by the laws of holiness, exhibited under the forms of truth, piety, self-denial, justice, usefulness, loving-kindness, and the use of those powers of reason, which are the distinction between man and the brute creation, and which will surely be aided by the gift of God's Holy Spirit, if in earnest faith we seek for it. According to these laws, He bids us form our plans and determine our object. When they are thus determined, He leaves us to exercise that awful gift of will, which is a part of his own nature, and carry out our object with the perseverance by which only it can be secured. But because our hearts are deceitful, and our reason apt to err, He, no doubt, does also from time to time, so shape the circumstances of our lot,—those, not in which we have placed ourselves, but which

are beyond our control,—that they may serve as directing posts, either to tell in what way our aim may best be attained, or possibly to warn us that it will be wise to abandon it altogether; and it is in this way, and this alone, that we are allowed to make use of circumstances. They may *guide*, but they must never *govern* us. Forgetfulness of this truth is the source of endless self-deception.

If we can imagine Pilate entering upon the task of self-examination, after delivering our Blessed Redeemer to be crucified, there would be two views which he might take of his action. One which judged it according to the law of *circumstances*, and by which, he might certainly seem to be, if not exculpated, at least greatly excused. Another which judged it only according to the eternal laws of right, and by which he would assuredly be condemned. For by that pure and immutable law, the innocent was to be saved. The manner in which the deliverance was to be attained, might be doubtful;—it might be decided according as circumstances should point out;—but the fixed, deliberate, unalterable determination of an upright Judge must have been the same under every combination of events. If it had been so with Pilate, if he had been guided by a consistent principle of justice, our Lord's trial would have been conducted differently; and the circumstances by which he was afterwards governed, would,—so far as human eyes can see,—never have arisen.

There are times when we must all, more or less,

be placed in similar positions,—when a crowd of harassing, perplexing circumstances, surround us, and we are tempted to say that we can form no decision, but must wait the course of events. It sounds very plausible; it looks almost like faith. But let us take heed; there must always be one object, one abstract point to be attained:—how we may best fulfil our duty to God. Other secondary aims for this world may be connected with it, and about these we may be doubtful, but there can be no doubt about this; and if we can only keep it steadily in view, it will infallibly lead us right in the end. If we act otherwise, we shall find that in grasping at the shadow we have lost the substance. Seeking for the duty of to-morrow, men often overlook the duty of to-day; yet in that is to be found the clue to their difficulty. To decide that we will only do that which is strictly consistent with justice, and consideration for the claims of others; and to determine that self-denial shall be our governing principle, and obedience to every, even the lightest call of *present* duty, the law of our daily life; will give us a strength of reason and a clearness of perception, which the most cultivated powers of understanding could never bestow. For circumstances, however apparently confused, can never be so in reality. Some one path must be more in accordance than others, with the law of *present* duty; we have but to choose that, even though it may lead us forward but one step. As we take this step, the circum-

stances in which we are placed, must necessarily change—we have ourselves changed them, for we have governed them, instead of allowing them to govern us; and the same law of *present*, not *distant*, duty is still at hand; by it we may still move forward, securely and trustingly, feeling that even if occasionally we err, through the weakness of human reason, and suffer, as we always shall, accordingly; yet He, whose law we have been striving to follow, will assuredly at length lead us even on earth, into “the green pastures,” and “beside the still waters,” where there will be no doubt, and no perplexity, but where His Will will be made clear to us, and we shall “know even as we are known.”

SELF-JUSTIFICATION.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 24, 25.

“ And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired ; but he delivered Jesus to their will.”

So at length the step, after which there could be no return, was taken. It was a great advance in guilt, so great that it seems quite sudden, but it is only *seeming*. We must all know that, if we remember how often we have argued and reasoned against a temptation, and then immediately afterwards given way to it. In all such cases the completed guilt is not sudden, and the very reason we have exercised proves it. We have been walking towards it deliberately ; only, as a man may close his eyes, when about to throw himself from a precipice, so we have closed our eyes to the act which in will is already done. Pilate himself did not think his determination sudden, he carried on his self-deception to the last. Still satisfying himself with the *wish* instead of the *will*, he gave sentence that it should be as they required. Even in the very act of setting the seal upon his previous

cowardice and injustice, he blinded himself by the declaration that it was not his sin, but that of others.

Not his sin! Can that ever be? Can any sinful act, done by ourselves, really not be ours? As we read Pilate's history we put the question in mockery. His guilt was so clear, his cowardice so evident. "He released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison; he delivered Jesus to their will."

But the Jews willed it; Barabbas was he whose release they desired. Pilate did not will it, he willed only that "it should be as they required." The sin of Pilate was but the answering echo to the sin of the Jews. Still we condemn him. Still the universal condemnation of the Christian world has branded him as the "murderer of Jesus."

If Pilate could now speak to us,—if it were permitted him to return from that abode of dread waiting where his spirit dwells, looking forward to the judgment,—if he could come among us and hear the sentence we pass upon ourselves, and compare it with that which we pass upon him, would he not have cause to appeal against us?

His guilt was but an echo, the answer to a greater guilt, but we refuse to admit the excuse. Yet is it not one which we daily, almost hourly offer in our own case? Do we not bring it forward to defend ourselves against public accusations? Is it not at hand to shield us from every, even the lightest form of domestic censure? Do we not

even dare to offer it before God, in the solitude of our chamber, whilst in His Presence carrying on the work of self-examination?

We were made angry. The treatment to which we were exposed was so irritating that we could not avoid anger. We were disobedient. We saw others setting the example, and it was impossible not to follow it. We yielded to sins of frivolity and vanity, but others were much worse, and tempted us by their wilful turning away from all serious thought. In almost every case, the first thought which arises in our mind, when we are accused of a fault, is, if possible, to lay the blame upon another—to say, that the sentence of our will was not to originate sin—but simply to echo it. And in that thought we rest. Such a common, such an almost universal fault, is not, we may say, to be compared with a crime like that committed by Pilate; but every sin, we must remember, has different stages of development, each being in itself complete; and as surely as the acorn contains the oak, so surely do our *faults* contain crimes. That they do not become crimes may be owing to God's mercy in shielding us from the opportunity of being guilty of them; or to His Grace enabling us to crush them before they are placed within the reach of those opportunities.

For the former we may be infinitely thankful at this present moment; but it is the latter alone, which can give us cause for hope hereafter.

And the habit of self-justification, the constant endeavour to extenuate our faults, does unquestionably lie at the foot of all self-deception, and therefore, of all that frightful amount of secret and unknown sin, which hurries thousands to everlasting destruction, by blinding them fatally to their true position. If we wish to be true ourselves or to make others true, if we desire really to make any progress in our Christian life, the very first point we must aim at, is so to conquer our pride as to take upon ourselves the burden of our own offences, to acknowledge them to others, to ourselves, and to God. Strange to say, the last is the most easy duty, and they who have shrunk from the slightest shadow of blame before their fellow-creatures, and even tried to discover excuses in their own sight, will often and often pour out their complaints to God, and own themselves guilty of the very sins, the accusation of which they have been so strenuously rejecting. That is because they take their own time for the acknowledgment. The first rush of indignation is over, pride has been satisfied, and conscience has had power to work. But real self-conquest and real sincerity of heart, are to be found in the acknowledgment at the moment,—the confession “I was wrong,” when pride whispers most loudly “I was right ;—or if not actually right, at least, justified in my fault, because of the aggravation I received.” There is no practice which tends more to open our eyes, and make us see ourselves as

we are. The instant we have brought ourselves to own that we were in fault, quite apart from the consideration whether others were more to blame than ourselves, we have no longer any motive for refusing to see truly. All that is generous towards our fellow-creatures, and loving and obedient towards God, rises up in our breast, and makes us anxious to know the full extent of our error; and in discovering the ground of one fault, we necessarily discover the existence of others; we become single-hearted, single-minded, and upon that single-mindedness, peace will necessarily follow.

“Peace that passeth understanding,” the peace that dwells with those whose wills are *at one* with God. Wide indeed is the gulf, infinite the distance, which separates that blest repose of conscience, from the false reasoning, the double-hearted self-excuse, the cold, mocking, pretended indifference of the miserable Pilate. We follow him onwards in imagination, to that last act of his guilty life, the memory of which still haunts the mountain from which he is said to have flung himself in his despair; and we look to our quiet homes, and our innocent employment, our daily duties, and our light faults, and the centuries of time which divide him from us, seem centuries also of moral separation.

But once—hereafter—how soon, who shall tell?—all distance of place and of time shall be annihilated, and we, with the murderer of Christ, shall stand side by side, before the Tribunal of Christ.

May God grant us to be so true to ourselves now, that the belief which we cherish, of being free from a participation in guilt like his, may then be found to be reality.

BEARING THE CROSS.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 26.

“ And as they led Him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus.”

THIS action of Simon, the Cyrenian, is always considered a type of the Christian life. Our Lord, himself, describes our duty under the figure of bearing the cross, and no one would therefore dare to dispute the exactness of the analogy. There must then be an evident practical lesson contained in it; and perhaps we are apt to think that it is one easily understood, if not readily carried into practice. We believe that bearing the cross is another mode of expression for patience and resignation, for the calm acceptance of whatever trials God may think fit to lay upon us; and with this view we perhaps strive to submit to our own portion of affliction without open murmuring, with a sense of strong endurance based upon duty. We strive, and for a time we succeed. Whilst a certain amount of external aid is granted us;—perhaps whilst we are in health, or not tried by bereavement, or permitted to have certain seasons of relief,—we bear up against all our trials. But there

is a point at which our strength fails : we bear the cross as we think after Jesus, but we are not able to carry it to Calvary ; and disappointed with ourselves, and tempted to think that God's help has forsaken us, our spirits sink, and we own ourselves crushed beneath our burden.

There must be some fault in us, when such a state of feeling exists. He who bids us bear our cross, tells us also that His strength is sufficient for us. If it does not prove sufficient, it must be because we have not really been obeying His commands.

Perhaps it may help us to discover where our mistake lies, if we consider more closely what is really taught us by the action of Simon, the Cyrenian. The cross which he bore after the Redeemer was laid upon him by the will of others, but when he had once assumed the burden we never hear that he even wished to lay it down.

Could he have done so? could any one, beholding the fainting steps—the bruised and lacerated frame of the Sinless One, who was toiling up the Hill of Calvary on His way to death,—have desired to spare himself, when by endurance he could spare Him? Could he even have thought of himself? Would not all consciousness of personal suffering be lost in overpowering sympathy for the anguish which Jesus, the Innocent and the Holy, was called upon to bear? Scripture indeed does not tell us that such were the feelings of Simon ; but our Lord when bidding us “ take up

our cross and follow Him," would seem prophetically to refer to this action of the Cyrenian, and thus to set upon him the blessed seal of His approval; teaching us to believe what is incidentally confirmed by other references in the Gospels and Epistles, that Simon was a true and willing sharer in his Lord's agony, faithful himself, and transmitting his faith to his children.*

Suffering with and for Christ! that appears to have been the secret of the Cyrenian's strength;—that also must be the secret of ours. Duty, necessity, and fortitude may be admitted, but as secondary influences. To desire to be like to Jesus, to endure because He endured;—to be thankful for trial because He was tried, for contempt because He was despised, for weariness because He was weary, for agony because He wore the crown of thorns and bore the piercing of the nails;—in such feelings, and in such alone, will be found the real fortitude of a Christian.

But it may be said we are looking at perfection, and imagining what can only be found in the devotion of a saint. Alas! it is but too true. The history of such resignation, such joy in sufferings and thankfulness in trial, belongs rather to the lives of martyrs than to us or our fellow-creatures now; unless it may be where, in homes unnoticed by the busy world, the souls of some whose names will leave no record on earth are

* See Blunt's Scriptural Coincidences.

training for the glory which is hereafter to render them brightest amongst the redeemed in Heaven.

This age is not the age of cheerful endurance ; the life of men in these days is not the life of those who deem themselves honoured by suffering, because it makes them like unto Christ. The comforts of our homes are our pride ; the mitigation of annoyance and discomfort is our allowed object. The one great virtue, which is acknowledged and revered by all classes of men, is philanthropy, the effort to alleviate the calamities of mankind. Suffering is an admitted evil, and it would seem folly to look upon it as a blessing.

There is so much truth in this view of life,—the idea of suffering being in itself desirable, or rendering us acceptable to God, is the cause of so much self-deception, and superstition,—that to put forth a doctrine apparently contrary to that which is now so universally received, must lay any person open to misconception. But it is the practice, not the theory, of suffering, which we are now considering.

Let it be granted that to seek for comfort is allowable, to shrink from pain natural, to strive to alleviate it right ; still will the fact remain unaltered as the truth of revelation, that “man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.”

Yes ; he is born to it, he cannot escape it. If so, why then is he not educated for it ? The inheritor of rank is taught to fit himself for that rank ; the heir of riches is, or should be, trained, that he may

make the best use of his riches; the child of the labourer is instructed that he may afterwards be enabled to support himself by labour; and the heir of suffering—the inheritor of sorrow and disappointment, of weariness, and anxiety, and pain, is taught—what? To shrink from the merest shadow of discomfort, to wrap himself in ease, to clothe himself with luxury, and to trust that when the trial hour shall overtake him, “as his day so shall his strength be.” Such is not the teaching of Christ, or the education of Christ’s church. The days of self-denial which are enforced upon us so gently, with no strict rules, but to be observed as each shall see best for his own case, are the protest against the flattering hopes of ease with which we are accustomed to soothe ourselves; and the opportunities for practising ourselves, without ostentation, and in all simplicity and sincerity, in the feelings which are to be our support under the real trials of actual life. If we examine what use we make of these seasons, we shall probably find that the same error which prevents our bearing the cross patiently in the world, prevents our bearing it with profit in the church. If we can, through God’s grace, teach ourselves to endure with a right spirit the petty privations of the latter, we shall certainly be more fully prepared to face the sufferings, however great, which may await us in the former.

How do we brace ourselves to submit to the light self-discipline imposed upon us in some form or other during Lent? Probably by a great effort

and a strong exertion of will. The time before us seems long, our own strength is weak, we pray, perhaps earnestly, and then we resolve in all sincerity and in all humility; but in the very act of bracing, we burden ourselves. Our self-denial becomes mechanical. We bear Christ's Cross, but we do not in thought follow Him. We have no pleasure in the idea that we are in any way made like unto Him; every day so much discomfort is past, but every day so much devotedness is not gained, for we have entered upon our task in a wrong spirit; there is duty but no love in our obedience.

One thought of our Saviour's sufferings, one remembrance of the Hill of Calvary, one wish that we, like Simon, the Cyrenian, could have taken the burden from Him; and one prayer that He would accept our miserable efforts at self-discipline as the offering of our sympathy, as well as the submission of our obedience; and we shall have learnt a deeper lesson of resignation and fortitude than could be obtained from the mechanical asceticism of years. And one Lent spent in such a spirit,—whatever may be the amount of self-denial which we feel called upon to practise—will prove a preparation for the longer seasons of trial, which must meet us in our journey through life; a preparation which shall enable us so to pass through them as to render them the path that shall surely conduct us to the glorious portals of Heaven.

FUTURE TRIALS.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 27—31.

“ And there followed Him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented Him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry ?”

THIS warning may perhaps be thought applicable only to the women who followed our Lord. Conscious, as we all must be, of our natural selfishness, it does not seem likely, except in cases of strong affection, that we can ever have more feeling for others than for ourselves. But there is a strange inconsistency in everything connected with human nature; and a search into our own hearts will show us one class of evils to which many of us are keenly alive for our acquaintances, but which we scarcely ever contemplate as being causes for our own present anxiety. Sudden accidents, sudden sickness and death, how natural it seems that such trials should come! how calmly we accept them, so long

as we only hear of them at a distance,—looking upon them as part of the mysterious probation of this fallen world! We are not, therefore, wanting in sympathy because we are thus calm; we are only using the reason which God has given us, and which proves to us from experience, what is taught us also by Revelation, that “man knoweth not his time; but as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.”

The only strange thing is that, what we accept as so necessary and inevitable for other persons, we should so quietly put aside as far distant from ourselves.

The wisest and the best among us do so; not, indeed, practically,—for wisdom and goodness teach us, by living to God, to live in preparation for whatever trial he may send,—but in words, and often in thought. Look at the schemes, listen to the conversation of the man of fifty for instance; who can possibly believe that he seriously understands and calculates upon the fact, that taking life at its best, he can reckon but upon twenty years more of activity and usefulness, and that in all probability that term will be diminished to fifteen, or even ten. Not that he will be sufficiently unreasonable to deny the shortness and uncertainty of life when the truth is forced upon him; he may even refer to it frequently as a matter of business; but it is nevertheless a fact apart from him, a

species of moral fiction, accepted because it is found necessary and useful, but nothing more.

There is a certain amount of good in this: if there were not, it would not be so natural and involuntary. If he really knew the thousand dangers in the midst of which we live; if we could behold "the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth in the noon-day," human weakness would not be able to bear up against the fear. The women who followed our Redeemer,—comforting Him as best they might in the hour of His agony, and thus following the dictates of the sympathy which He Himself had implanted in their breasts,—would have been paralysed by terror if they could have vividly foreseen and understood the horrible events to which His warning words referred. Ignorance was their strength, and ignorance is ours also; and the present necessities of our existence, which drives from us the thought of the future, do also undoubtedly prepare us for it. But as our Lord saw it needful at times to rouse His followers from their security, and bid them turn their thoughts away from the sorrows of those around them, and concentrate them upon their own position; so must we also, if we would in any way live by His rules, compel ourselves to face the fact, that the suffering which excites our sympathy may be in store for ourselves, and that the death which so naturally overtakes our neighbour, has perhaps, but one step more to make before it shall overtake us.

In a week, to-morrow, this afternoon, we may die ; who is to say that we shall not ?

The possibility seems so unlikely, that it has no effect upon us.

But say that we shall live,—say that we are certain of life till we are seventy ; how many more portions of earthly existence similar to that which we have already passed can we look forward to ? We are perhaps young, we have lived only twenty years ; two more such portions, and ten years added, and life is over. And this is making a very unlikely calculation. The tables which reckon the average of men's lives will tell us that. And what if we have already lived through two of these portions ? What if we have already climbed the hill, and passed the mid-way resting-place, and are descending with apparently tenfold rapidity on the other side ?

No ; death is not far off, and the precursors, the shadows and types of death,—sickness and sorrow,—are not far off ; but very near, very present to us. We dwell on the border land of suffering, even in our greatest prosperity, and every little pain, every little annoyance or inconvenience, is a messenger, which bids us live in-expectation of the hour when we shall be called upon to enter it.

Come that hour must. Into what portion of the land of trial we shall be summoned, God only knows. It may be that our present life is gently leading us to it ; it may be that our lot will be suddenly thrown amidst scenes so new and strange,

that no present imagination can give us a foretaste of them. Be that as it may, God has not left us without light to guide and hope to cheer us. He bids us "weep for ourselves," but He shows us also how those who have wept before us have at length been comforted.

It is indeed the rule of life generally, that no man profits by any experience but his own; yet there is one kind of experience which may perhaps be considered an exception. It is that gained at the deathbeds of those who "die in the Lord, who rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." Few persons probably have attained mature age without having had some experience granted them. It may not be published in excited language to the world, and made a means of worldly profit; it may not be told to our friends, or even spoken of to the nearest and dearest by our own fireside; but it lives, treasured in our hearts; the one thought of strength when faith grows weak; the one ray of light, when life is dark and troubled.

They who have gone before us in suffering, they whose footsteps we have followed with sympathy, as the mourning women followed the footsteps of their Redeemer, have left with us a blessing which they little thought of;—a strength even in the very spectacle of their weakness. All those hours of lingering pain at which we so wondered, asking perhaps in moments of unbelief whether God could indeed love those whom He so afflicted, were hours of untold value, for they were tracing the record of

that mighty strength by which the saints of God are enabled to wait with patience "the appointed time, until their change come." All the words and looks of faith and love were prophecies and promises of the Spirit of faith and love, who will be at hand when we need His aid. The gradual lessening of their earthly cares, which made us marvel as we watched the change that passed over them, the calm acquiescence in God's Will, the bright hope, the present realisation of future happiness; they were all treasures gathered for our use, which no effort could have purchased, no gladness of this world have procured for us.

Therefore are they memories infinitely precious. Bought with the sufferings of Christ they are hallowed in their measure as those sacred memories from which the women of Jerusalem may have found strength in their own hour of trial: and therefore also will we call them no longer memories, but actual, ever-living means of participation in the blessed communion of saints; facts, words, scenes, now our own in loving thought, hereafter to be our own—God grant it—in loving feeling.

PRAISE AND ADMIRATION

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 32.

“And there were also two other, malefactors, led with Him to be put to death.”

THIS is another verse which we read continually without thought, but which implies a whole volume of suffering and degradation. To be led away with malefactors, to be reckoned with them, to know that our name was numbered with theirs ; how horrible it would have been even to us—in the sight of God—malefactors ourselves ! What it was to our blessed Saviour we cannot venture to imagine ; we know only that He had all the keen human feelings which would make such an association agony ; and all the Divine knowledge of the guiltiness of guilt which would render it abhorrent to Him as being absolutely and immeasurably antagonistic to his nature.

We do not think of this as we ought when considering the circumstances of our Lord's trial. All that He underwent, has become to us so sacred, so worthy of all reverence, that we forget that it did not appear to be so at the time when He en-

dured it; and that in this especially the Cup of which He drank had a bitterness peculiarly its own. Suffering with us generally involves a certain amount of dignity. However poor and wretched an individual may be, if we hear that he is enduring intense pain of body, or grief of mind, we look on him with awe, amounting to respect. But there was no respect excited by our Redeemer's death of torture. It was not even singular or exceptional; cruel, though we deem it, it was common, and shared with the lowest and vilest; and many, perhaps, in the vast crowd, who had collected, as men always will collect at any spectacle of horror, scarcely distinguished Him from the malefactors at His side.

To think of this strikes at the root of all pride whether of action or endurance,—and there is in the world as much of the latter as of the former. If we wish to be like Christ, there can be no desire for distinction of any kind. And there are minds for which this caution is much needed;—there are self-willed martyrs, who will unflinchingly endure any amount of suffering if only the eye of their fellow-creatures may follow them with admiration; whilst, even amongst those who have no such morbid desire for distinction, the same feeling will be found, more or less, to exist. Why is it so easy to be self-denying in society,—so difficult to be so in our own homes? Why do we find individuals famed for actions of benevolence, devoting fortune, and time, and physical strength, to works of public

good, yet failing in the charities of private life? Why do we so often, if called upon to bear any unusual trial, solace and support ourselves by the thought that there are those looking on upon our lives who are admiring and respecting us?

We may not, indeed, think little of that support when it is offered by the good and the holy. Even our Redeemer, we may believe, may have been soothed by the reverent, though sorrowing, gaze of His Virgin Mother, and the awe-struck sympathy of His beloved disciple. It is not the respect of the few, but the admiration of the many, which is our stumbling-block; and even then the danger lies less in the acknowledged and admitted praise or admiration which may be offered us, than in the vague atmosphere of admiration which we breathe without perceiving it, and in which, unknown to ourselves, our actions find the spring of their life. The admiration of an individual startles us; it comes before us in a definite shape, and appeals to our conscience for a witness, which conscience is unable to give; and perhaps, we are enabled to reject it, whilst shrinking from the voice of flattery, we cast ourselves on our knees before God, praying that, for Christ's sake, He would support us in the Day of Shame, when the secrets of our hearts must be revealed. But the admiration of the world generally, comes to us in no such guise; it takes no particular form; it brings us no precise offering, which we may satisfy ourselves by refusing; it creeps into our hearts, and sullies our

motives and renders us unreal, even at the very moment when we fancy ourselves most simple-minded,—most indifferent to it. If we would know whether it does so influence us, let us ask ourselves how we could bear to part with it? If, suddenly, upon no fault of our own,—from no cause that we could understand,—we were to sink, though not in the opinion of our personal friends, yet in the estimation of our immediate circle of acquaintances, of the persons who know us by name, and think of, and talk of us,—what effect would such a change have upon us? Should we quietly pursue our path of daily duty, looking only to God? or should we fret and disturb ourselves,—seeking to set ourselves right, as we term it, with persons whose opinion is individually of no value, but whose collective support we felt that we could not do without? And if we did more than sink in general estimation,—if our characters were traduced, our words misrepresented, our actions misconstrued, till we felt that the finger of scorn was pointed at us, and that we had fallen in the scale of society,—still from no fault of our own, but from the course of unlooked-for events, and circumstances which we could not control, would it be a trial which we could endure patiently? However our hearts might sink at times, would God, our conscience, and our own good friends, be, on the whole, sufficient for us?

Each one must answer for himself. But if we desire really to make ourselves independent of such

a possibility—really to become indifferent to the world's praise, and superior to its censures, we must place ourselves in thought beneath the Cross of the Redeemer, and learn the lesson which is there taught us.

We say that we love Christ. If we do not say it, we wish that we could. But if we love Him, we must long to be like Him; we must be willing to follow Him. And what does He say to those who would thus follow Him? "Whosoever doth not bear his Cross, and come after Me, cannot be my disciple."

To bear the Cross and to come after Him! Not, therefore, to lay it down, but to be laid upon it. To be crucified—if so He will—to all that we have most prized. To be lifted up—if so He will—with the crown of shame upon our brow, and the words of mockery above our heads. And from that Cross of shame, to look down upon the careless crowd, watching our suffering with an idle curiosity, mingling our name with the vilest, and turning the moanings of our agony into the expression of a humiliating weakness.

The admiration of the world, and the Cross of Christ, what have they in common?

Surely to suffer is a great privilege,—to bear the burden of life's care and grief, a precious blessing; but we risk the privilege and mar the blessing, by submitting to the intrusion of the vain and petty satisfaction which is offered us by the thought—"the world sees and admires." That

thought will come ; it is too natural to our own hearts, and too valuable a suggestion for the Temper, for us to be able to escape it. But we may crush it. It may be taken at once in prayer to Christ and offered to Him in sacrifice ; and when it is so offered, He will give us in return the joy which wakes at the sound of the "Still Small Voice," whispering to us, that we have "loved the praise of God more than the praise of men."

FEELING.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 33.

“And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.”

HUMAN inconsistency is marvellous even to human beings. To think in detail of our Redeemer's sufferings, to consider, and, though in an infinitely faint degree, to realize what is implied by the words, “They crucified Him;” and to feel,—as though God's mercy we may sometimes be enabled to feel,—actual shrinking pain ourselves from sympathy with His Pain; and then to go away, and in another quarter of an hour, or even in less time, yield to some petty self-indulgent temptation, which it requires scarcely a thought to withstand; these are the things which render our nature wonderful and inexplicable, and almost lead us in our disheartened despondency to imagine, that the struggle we have entered upon is hopeless, and that the world and sense must ultimately triumph.

Yet it is wrong to be thus disheartened. It is much to have been allowed, even for a short inter-

val, the power of sympathy with our Lord's anguish. During childhood and often during many years of youth, it is, except in rare cases, quite out of reach. The words which speak of His death convey no meaning, beyond that of reason. They reach the intellect, but they cannot go farther. If, therefore, we have advanced but one step beyond this blind indifference, we may look forward with hope to advancing many more. The hope is especially to be cherished in middle life, or when youth is just waning ; for these are seasons as trying in our spiritual, as in our temporal affairs. The long experience of failure, and the consequent deepening sense of infirmity, together with the unveiling of the past, are then so crushing, they cause a feeling of physical oppression at the heart, which is very wearying. And to add to this sense of guilt, the clearer and clearer perception that our Lord actually, in truth, suffered, endured, was tortured, because of these offences ! It seems astonishing, at times, that we should be any more able to bear up against the thought than against any other deep sorrow, such as the death of a human friend, or the sight of intense agony of body, or depression of mind ; all of which, it is so trying to the physical frame to be brought in contact with. But in reality the comfort we need is to be found in the very sorrow which we experience, and which in grief connected with this world so often overwhelms us. We weep for the sickness and the death of our earthly friends, but our tears are lonely and selfish ;

we weep for the anguish of Christ,—and our tears become the offering of sympathy,—the sign of that dearest gift of a loving heart which is the one recompense He seeks. We may therefore thankfully remember even the slightest indications of a softened spirit which God may be pleased to grant us; and treasure them, as we treasure the remembrance of our self-conquests; not with any feelings of pride;—they who really wish to love our Saviour, and have considered what that love ought to be, will be shocked even at the suggestion of such a possibility—but with hope grounded upon gratitude. Feelings are God's gifts, independent of our will, and yet not bestowed against our will. They are rare blessings, vouchsafed in unequal proportions; but the very least are of value as earnest of greater blessings, and therefore tokens to encourage us. No man, even in the hour of his most bitter repentance, would wish to part with the anguish of that repentance. He would blot out his sin, but he would not forget his sorrow,—much less if with that sorrow have been mingled sympathy and love.

Those precious springs of feeling,—those wells in the desert, with the trees of hope clustering round them,—beneath which our weary hearts have for a while found rest, may well linger in our memory, and cheer us when we are again journeying through the sandy waste. Once we felt, once we loved, once we reposed under the shadow of the Great Rock, and even in exhaustion found

strength, as the fountains of love were unsealed by the power of God's Spirit. True we are again parched and dry; true the way seems long, and the track has become confused, and the mirage rises to delude us; and we gaze over the burning sky, resting our eyes anxiously on the far-off horizon, but catching no glimpse of the green hills of the Land of our deliverance; but so surely as we have once known what it was to rest beside that Living Fountain, and to lie down beneath the shelter of that Mighty Rock, so surely, if we will but continue our course, shall the clear spring of a grateful heart, and the unspeakable rest of a loving spirit, again be vouchsafed to us.

Only we must continue. The toil and conflict, the weariness and disappointment of the desert, these are now our portion; not the short but blest repose of the green oasis. If we are striving to obey, whatever be the extent of our efforts we are advancing; and it is advancement which we seek. We mourn for our Saviour's sufferings; we leave His Presence and sin. That fact may indeed dishearten us, but the very knowledge that we are disheartened is a call to give us courage again. To be disheartened, is to be disappointed. To be disappointed, is to fail in that which we wish. To wish, if the wish is for holiness, is a gift of God, and a token of His love. Again may we set out with renewed hope; and this not once, or twice; not "until seven times," but "until seventy times seven." And thus shall

we look back upon those happier hours, when the consciousness of love was our refreshment, with thankfulness rather than with sadness. If life be prolonged, we may look for them to be restored to us here; if it be shortened, we may be certain that they will be perpetuated in Heaven.

There, we shall feed again. In that new life love will find a fresh spring. And there all which is now bitter to us in our moments of sympathy and devotion, will be overpowered by the sight of our Saviour's happiness. When the innumerable company of the redeemed shall stand before the throne of Christ, even the words "they crucified Him," will be remembered without pain. When "Jesus shall wipe away all tears from our eyes," even those which have flowed at the thought that our sins were His torturers, will for ever be dried.

"Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me; for Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

That must have been a prayer for an unutterable Joy, for it was offered in the immediate prospect of an unutterable Agony. If there are moments when our hearts are oppressed with a heavy weight, a thought for which there would seem no solace,—even that He who redeemed us suffered, and that no sympathy, no love of ours can be offered in

recompence for those sufferings ;—let us remember this last longing of His Soul, and as we pour out our hearts in prayer, for blessings upon those who are most dear to us on earth, so let us pray that the Joy to which Jesus looked forward, in the presence of His own death, may be His, soon—yes, for His sake, very soon,—in the day of our resurrection.

“ Surely I come quickly : Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

SINS OF IGNORANCE.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 34.

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

SHOULD this prayer have been considered by us at all, it may in many cases have been with the question in our minds, how far guilt can co-exist with ignorance,—a question to which we can probably give no satisfactory answer. But the distinction between willing and unwilling ignorance—in which all the difficulty lies—is, perhaps, after a time, brought home to us by some light thrown upon a sin which for years we have been persuading ourselves was not sin; and then our perplexity is solved. The clue to its solution is to be found in that one word,—*persuading*. We require no persuasion to satisfy us about actions which are clearly innocent. When a man has determined to speak the truth, he does not require to be persuaded that he is right. When he resolves to conquer some evil passion, he never argues with himself in order to be quite convinced that he is justified in his self-control. When we are forced

to *persuade* ourselves that we are right, it is because conscience is whispering to us that we are wrong, and, the whisper being painful, we desire to silence it; so that, in fact, we are not sinning in ignorance. We know not, possibly, what we do; we may not see, or understand, or be able to calculate the extent of evil involved in our actions; but we do know quite enough to convince us that we had better not do it. And the greater the possible guilt, or the possible danger of our action, the greater also must be our responsibility in committing it. There are occasions when we may see, either in our own career or in that of others, instances of a great punishment following upon what we can scarcely bring ourselves to call a great offence, because it is committed, we say, for the most part, ignorantly; and there may appear to be a startling severity in such an amount of retribution. An act of carelessness produces, perhaps, ruin for life, and we think that the penalty is in no way proportioned to the fault; but if the person who committed the act was told that ruin might follow upon it, his offence ceased to be merely carelessness, and must be measured, not by its own intrinsic evil, nor by his own intentions, but by his knowledge of the necessity of care. So the least suspicion that any doubtful action is connected with great evil intensifies its guilt. Levity and frivolity—light sins, as we call them—excusable as we think them in young persons, are not really excusable. No doubt, we, who are older, look

upon them as leading to serious evil ; whilst young persons do not understand their danger ; but we cannot, therefore, say that they are not to be condemned severely if they give way to them. It is true, they do not understand all the danger, but they understand a part. They know that vanity and levity will lead to forgetfulness of the retiring delicacy which should be a woman's characteristic ; and they know also that the loss of that delicacy is one of the greatest evils which can befall her. The connection between the two states of mind is, therefore, quite sufficiently clear to render them responsible for their own conduct, and to lay them justly open to the condemnation of God, and the punishment that, in many cases, falls, as we are apt to think severely, upon offences which, taken in themselves, we might deem trifling.

There is, in fact, too often a fatal delusion concealed under this plea of ignorance. If it has been ours, and we have been awakened from it ; however great may have been the suffering caused by such awakening, we have reason to thank God, as one who has stood blindly upon the brink of a yawning gulf, and has been withdrawn from it by some loving hand, though only to see before him a pathway of toil and difficulty. It is suffering,—it must be. To discover that whilst believing ourselves to have acted ignorantly, we have in fact committed a great sin, and that we might, if we had willed, have known it to be sin, is a shock to our whole moral being. It destroys, not self-

confidence, which ought to be destroyed, but the confidence in our own integrity of purpose, which is absolutely necessary for wise self-government.

If we have been so deceived once, why should we not be again? If we have been cruel, when we thought ourselves merciful; deceitful, when we imagined ourselves sincere; impure, when we thought ourselves free from the slightest taint,—who is to say that we have any right to trust to our own self-knowledge? and if we cannot thus trust, how can we be safe from a repetition of the same self-deceit?

There was One who prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” They ought to have known; they might have known. He had wrought His miracles amongst them, and their eyes were blinded to His Divinity; He had preached to them, and their ears were closed to His superhuman knowledge; now they were in the act of crucifying Him, and in that act they crucified their Redeemer.

But they knew not what they did. It was no plea to Justice, but it was a cry to Mercy, and it was offered by the dying Saviour. And when the sins, which we have called sins of ignorance, but which in reality were sins of wilful blindness,—rise up before us in the anguish of newly enlightened conscience, we can but appeal to the same Mercy, and cast ourselves upon the love of the same Saviour.

We see it all now. We know ourselves to have been what once we should have trembled even to

think ourselves, and we do not seek to extenuate our guilt. The sin presses upon us—apart from ignorance, apart from pardon. As in the crime of manslaughter, the stain of blood is upon us, and nothing can obliterate it in our own eyes; and we accept the pain, and, owning it to be just, scarcely seek to mitigate it. But we crave for pardon. Perplexed with questionings as to the extent of our offence, we know not what repentance is required of us; till when the heart grows heavy, and the conscience sinks under its burden, memory recalls those loving and most wonderful words of Jesus as the only hope, the one remaining consolation to which, in our misery, we may cling.

We knew not what we did, but Christ, the merciful Saviour, watched it all. He saw our self-deception; He beheld us closing our eyes to the truth, which at first was clear, and heard the arguments which we brought forward to convince ourselves that it was not truth; He saw us turning from the suggestions of His Spirit, and confusing our reason by sophistries; and He looked on whilst others, like ourselves, placed in similar temptations, escaped unscathed, because they *followed* conscience instead of *persuading* it. And yet He prays for us!

Because we did not fully see—because if we had seen, it may be we should have been startled and drawn back—He prays now, as in the hour of His death, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

And once more, also, even in the day of Judgment, may that prayer be offered for each one of us!

An ordeal, then, awaits us,—the knowledge of what sin is, and of our own individual share in it. On this side the grave that knowledge can never be attained. Perhaps, the sight of heaven and the Presence of the Saviour may be needed to enable even the redeemed to endure it.

THE TRUE EXHIBITION OF POWER.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 34, 35.

“ And they parted His raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided Him, saying, He saved others; let Him save himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God.”

THE consciousness of power, without the permission to use it, is a great trial—greater far than helplessness; for the necessity imposed by weakness does in one way constitute strength. Men die composedly because they cannot resist death. They submit without murmuring, because complaint is useless. Much which strikes us as fortitude may be traced to this strength of an inevitable necessity; and to it, therefore, may be ascribed many of those examples of calmness in the prospect of the grave and of a Judgment to come, which startle us when exhibited by persons who, we have too much reason to fear, have no well-grounded hope of salvation. But to feel superior to all weakness, and yet to lie helpless; to know in ourselves that with only a wish we could be free, and yet to remain captive; to feel the excruciating throb of torture, and voluntarily to compel ourselves to submit to it,

when at one word, one look, perfect ease might be ours;—this requires a strength which, even when exhibited by a fellow-creature, excites our wondering admiration; when exhibited by Him who was God, must bow us to the dust in awe.

For if the greatness of endurance increases with the consciousness of power, the endurance of our Redeemer must have been as infinite as His Divine nature.

“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me twelve legions of angels?” It was the thought which arose to His mind, when He first delivered Himself to His enemies. He could save Himself; and in the hour of His human weakness we know that He had even desired to do so. But the awfulness of His unutterable Majesty, which had been asserted at the bar of Pilate, and the consciousness of which had rendered Him silent to the mocking questions of Herod, was now hidden. He was hanging upon the Cross silent—not, as it must have seemed, with the voluntary silence of Divinity, but with the exhaustion of the death of humiliation—and then it was that the scornful cry arose, “He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God.”

It could scarcely have been the mockery of merely human enmity. We recognise in it the repetition of that same temptation of the Devil: “If Thou be the Son of God, command these stones

to be made bread." Give the proof of Divinity. Save thyself, and in saving thyself save others.

But our Redeemer, with the full consciousness of strength, bore meekly the taunt of weakness. He refused to convince by a miracle those for whose sake He had given Himself to death. And in that mighty self-control, that endurance, infinite beyond the power of human words, He gives a lesson to the humblest and the weakest, who, in the temptations of daily life, may be called upon to bear reproach when self-justification is unlawful, yet at hand; or to yield to a specious act of real evil for the sake of good to those they love.

For are not these temptations, forms, under which this great trial endured by Christ—which we may be inclined to think could in no way be brought near to ourselves,—is, in fact, from time to time, presented to us.

Power greater than we are permitted to use is more or less placed in all our hands; and though we may, perhaps, think that it approaches to irreverence to liken such trials to that of our blessed Redeemer, when in the midst of His agony He refused to give to the mocking Jews the token of His divinity, we may be quite certain that if we do not thus liken them, we shall not be able to bear them. It is the experience of us all that we fail in small matters; that we can overcome what are called great temptations, but that we sink under light ones. Satan tempts us by these small things; by them he undermines our strength, and

prepares the way for what we consider real sins. And how is this? Because we despise them, and, not seeing the magnitude of the evil principle involved in them, have no idea of the magnitude of the good principle which must be summoned to our aid if we would resist them. The Life of Christ is an example to the world. If so, then, it must be applicable to all ages, positions, and circumstances; and none can be so humble, and no trials so petty, as to be beyond its influence. We are to take up our Cross daily; therefore, we must daily live and act as those who are crucified to their own inclinations; and, therefore, must the thoughts and words of the crucified Saviour be in their measure ours likewise. And is it really so easy a duty to have power, but not to use it except under certain limits? When God gives us the power of speech, and self-justification is to be withheld because "a soft answer turneth away wrath?" When He bestows a talent, and forbids it to be displayed—when He gives wealth and generosity, and tells us that justice and prudence must put limits to our liberality—when He endows us with warm feelings, and we are not permitted to give way to them—and when, because of our silence, or humility, or prudence, or self-control, we are taunted as having no means of gratifying ourselves, and no feeling for our fellow-creatures—is there, indeed, no trial for us? Then, indeed, are we more miserable than in our extremest humiliation we will allow, more weak than

even in our weakest moments we can bring ourselves to confess.

For we fall ; who does not fall ?—in these ways, and in others like them, daily, hourly. We fall because we look at such temptations not as Christ saw them when He hung upon the cross to be our example ; but as the world sees them when it separates the life of the Christian from the life of the human being ; and decides that the trials incident to daily existence are too petty to have any connection with the preparation of heart, which through God's grace is to fit us for Heaven.

If our Redeemer vouchsafed to liken our cross to His, who are we that we should dare to say that the resemblance may with safety be rejected ? In Heaven, if it should please God to bring us there, we shall doubtless see all things clearly ; and there will it be made known to us what is the real proportion of the temptations which now come to us under so many different forms, and appear to be of such unequal value. And there, perhaps, also, we shall learn the preciousness of that quiet, firm spirit of self-mastery, which is lord over its own strength—can hold even its own power in subjection ; its preciousness when exercised by those who hang on their cross daily by their Saviour's side, and measuring themselves, so far as they may, by Him, lose all thought of self in the contemplation of His super-human endurance.

RIDICULE.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 36—38.

“And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming to Him, and offering Him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself. And a superscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

THERE was bitter insult in this title. Whether by it Pilate wished to express his contempt for the Jews, or for our Blessed Lord, it was equally derision in the face of suffering; and even if the Roman Governor himself may have stood aloof from the coarse taunts which accompanied it, he took no measure to restrain the mockery of his soldiers. That sight of horror which, when viewed calmly, we might have imagined must have melted the hardest heart with compassion, was, to those who took the chief part in it, merely a spectacle for insulting ridicule.

YET these men were not all cruel by nature; Pilate, we have seen, was not. He allowed others, indeed, to be so; but he himself washed his hands of the Innocent Blood, and called upon the Jews to save the Guiltless One. And the Roman soldiers

were not therefore cruel because they did the deed of cruelty ; they were only obedient ; they did only what they dared not refuse to do. And the same men who drove the sharp nails into the Redeemer's loving Hands, and fastened his tender Feet to the Cross, may have had wives who clung to them in affection, and children who clustered around them in trust. But they were cruel when they mocked. It may be that mockery was the opiate which stilled the risings of natural compunction, and that they had accustomed themselves to it ; for it is the common support of a rough untutored nature ; as ridicule, which is mockery of a gentler kind, is of one more refined.

The sin is not so far removed from ourselves as we may imagine. When Pilate wrote above the Cross, " This is Jesus, the King of the Jews," and then allowed the soldiers to use the title as a taunt, he sanctioned by the force of mockery the act which he knew to be a cruel injustice. And, in like manner, when we allow ourselves scornfully to give false names and false titles, and then making our own words the plea for our conduct, act slightly and unkindly towards those holier than ourselves, we also, in our degree, are following in Pilate's footsteps.

The same tendency to destroy or injure truth and goodness by the instrument of ridicule shows itself under many forms.

That common but most true saying, " There is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous," is

in fact, a very grave warning. Owing, doubtless, to the imperfection of our fallen nature, there is scarcely anything in which we are concerned, when acting one with another, that may not, if we will, be open to ridicule. Works excellent in themselves are made ridiculous by the vanity, pretension, and self-consequence of those who are engaged in them; and seizing upon these defects, we allow them to neutralize the rightful influence of the good which belongs to them. And when conscience reproaches us for our frivolity, we say, and we sincerely think, that we cannot help ourselves. We know that we are created with a perception of the ridiculous, and we cannot but perceive that persons who are destitute of it do in some way suffer in consequence; that they fall into mistakes, and give unnecessary offence; and often do harm where they intended to do good. But we forget that ridicule has only one legitimate office, connected not so much with principles themselves, as with a sense of their fitness and proportion.

Abstract evil is too serious a matter for ridicule; so also is abstract good. But disproportionate goodness is open to it, and may lawfully be attacked by it. A man who carries any virtue or any principle to excess may be ridiculed—but for the excess, not for the virtue; and here it is that the difficulty meets us. The line which separates the excess from the due exercise of any particular virtue is so narrow, the distinction between the act of goodness and the form under which it ex-

hibits itself, is so subtle, that it is extremely difficult for us to recognize it. And as it is unquestionably sinful to ridicule goodness, ridicule becomes a most dangerous weapon, and the desire to use it a temptation against which we should guard almost above all others.

We begin, indeed, by assailing the disproportion of a virtue, but we end by destroying the virtue itself. And this not only in the case of others, but in our own; or rather, more surely and more fatally in the latter case than in the former. To turn any form of right principle into ridicule, is often insensibly to bring ourselves to adopt a wrong one. And Satan knows this well. He dreads a grave regret for the mistakes of the good, but he rejoices in the sharp and witty sarcasm; for thousands there are who would never be led into evil if it were not presented to them as evil, but who yet ultimately adopt it without scruple, because they have become accustomed to it, whilst ridiculing what they saw to be the opposite exaggeration of good. We laugh, for instance, at over-scrupulousness, and whilst we are laughing we teach ourselves to be careless. We mock at overstrained forms of reverence, and insensibly become irreverent. We turn over-seriousness into a jest, and become frivolous. Not that these excesses of goodness should always be left untouched by ridicule, but that the attempt to reach them by it should never be made except with deliberation, under a clear sense of duty, and with the protest that the goodness itself

is still honoured by us. That this caution is especially needed we shall at once perceive, if we recollect that ridicule is a power, that, as far as we see, can be exercised only in a condition of being in which good and evil are mingled, and in which, therefore, evil will possibly and probably preponderate. The thought of such a faculty as connected with Heaven is profane, and as connected with Hell, horrible and despairing.

And we should also remember that the very fact of its being a power given us by God, makes it the more effective, and the more fatal when used for Satan. The best things are the worst in their abuse—none more so than the power of ridicule, and the sense of the ridiculous.

If employed as God intends, such a sense will teach us how to guard and fence our principles, to proportion our words, to choose fitting language for fitting thoughts. It will keep us from singularity, which may lead to the sin of ostentation; eagerness, which may end in selfishness; carelessness, which may be followed by neglect of the feelings of others. It does, in fact, compel many to practise self-restraint, even before their hearts are turned to God, and they have learnt to look upon such restraint as a duty. But if used as Satan intends, let us only ask our own hearts, and in the sad reproaches of conscience receive the answer. How many words of counsel have we rejected, because the perception of some absurdity connected with them rendered them at the moment ineffect-

ive! How many good feelings have we destroyed in their germ, because we saw, or fancied we saw, that, if allowed to grow and strengthen, they might excite laughter in some minds! How many unkind actions have we committed, simply because we were touched with a sense of the ridiculous! How by this same sense have we suffered ourselves to be misled, intoxicated with thoughtless mirth, until we have said, and done—and borne, that others should say and do—things which we knew to be offensive to God and injurious to our own souls! How have we not suffered this same element of excitement to be mingled with our pleasures, until at length we have drunk deeply and freely of the effervescing draught of sin, which if offered in another guise, we should have rejected with loathing as poison.

These things we all know—more or less, perhaps, we all feel. If we would learn to be more watchful, let us recal the title written over the Cross, and the scoffs of the Roman soldiers; and think that, in their eyes, even the Crucifixion of Christ was open to the mockery which was but a coarser form of ridicule.

COMMUNITY IN SUFFERING.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 39.

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.”

THE railing of the malefactor touches us, perhaps, more keenly than any other of the human words spoken at our Lord's crucifixion: for it rouses all our better feelings of indignation and sympathy,—the first feeling of our heart being, that community in suffering must bring community in feeling. But this expectation is the result of Christian hope, rather than of human experience. The history of all ages, the records of famine, pestilence, and war, most especially in the days of heathenism, show us that suffering, apart from religion, hardens the heart; and that it is the especial touchstone, by which to try whether a disposition is really noble. This, however, is not an effect which we are likely willingly to acknowledge, for we all wish to think ourselves kind-hearted, and in many cases tears rise to the eyes so readily, and the impulse to relieve distress is so quick, that it is difficult to imagine that we can really be wanting in any of

the gentle and affectionate feelings of our nature. But we must remember, that the examples of selfish cruelty, in times of calamity, which meet us in history, or which come before us in seasons of great public distress, are not taken from among the exceptions—the monsters of our race. Great national misfortunes are allowed, so far as we can see, to fall upon individuals, and try them without reference to the distinctions of age, or sex, or worth, or circumstances; and it is only through the trial that the character is discovered. The man who lives in our own village, with whom we meet and converse in kindly intimacy, is just as likely to evince new traits of selfishness, or even cruelty, under new and trying combinations of events, as the man who lived in a French village in the days of the French revolution; or in an Athenian village in the days of the Athenian plague. And in like manner with ourselves; even if we strive to judge of what we should be under great trial—in a position of danger—by an examination into what we are now in our daily life, our opinion must be formed with great doubt and self-distrust. With many persons it is no effort to be sympathising when they themselves are at ease—that is, to be what they call sympathising—in other words, to dislike the sight of suffering, and to do their best to free themselves from it. This may seem a severe definition, but is it not in many instances true? Are there not persons who will shrink from the sight of pain of any kind; who

cannot bear even to cause it by the utterance of a disagreeable truth; and who will make real exertions to relieve the misfortune which lies at their door; and who yet will act with deliberate selfishness, and sacrifice the happiness of their children, and their children's children, simply because the sorrows which reason tells them must follow upon their actions, are not actually present, and, therefore, not felt or thought of. Is the kind-heartedness of such persons real? or is it rather a refined selfishness? Are we to believe that, even if touched by community of suffering, we could look to them for support upon any principle but that of the relief which, by affording it, they might afford to themselves?

So again, as another proof of our unconscious selfishness. Is not the first thought that rises in our minds, when we are called upon to speak words of sympathy, a comparison with something which we ourselves have done and suffered? and does not this thought find vent in descriptions of our trials by which perhaps we think to show how well we understand and how much we feel, whilst in reality we are wishing to draw attention to all that we have undergone in our own persons? And has it never struck us how little effect this species of consolation has produced? Or again, when the same kind of comfort is bestowed upon us, how do we bear it? If we feel a distracting pain, and are told that some other person in the house is undergoing yet greater, does it irritate or soften

us? Do we forget ourselves? or do we rather feel as though our peculiar privilege of suffering had been entrenched upon? Does it not often seem hard to us to be compelled to exert ourselves when we also are in pain? Are we not ready to complain of injustice and unkindness in those who think of us less because we are enduring less; and would we not, indeed, willingly bear a larger portion, if we could only feel that we stood alone—that the praise of heroism and patience, and the comfort of sympathy, were ours without any one to share them?

These may be very humiliating feelings, and we may be loth to acknowledge them; but there must be few who are not, more or less, conscious of them, and who have not, therefore, reason to look upon themselves distrustfully; and instead of forming day-dreams as to the sympathy and kindness they would show in imaginary cases, to ask God's forgiveness for what they neglect in those immediately before their eyes.

God does not try us all by the experience of community of suffering in the form of national calamities, but of domestic trials, consequent on the very condition of our earthly existence. The sufferers upon the cross—the weary with life's long toil, the burdened who, in quietness and patience, are bearing the heavy load of life's cares,—they are with us; they dwell with us; we share in their anxieties, we partake in their sorrows. But what sympathy do we offer them? When do we ex-

ert ourselves to give them rest from their labour, or seek to lessen the weight which presses upon their hearts? We smile, perhaps, ourselves; but it is because at the moment our hearts are light; we speak kindly, but it is because we have no reason to speak otherwise; we take thought for their comfort, because it is a habit or a duty; but if we ourselves are suffering, where can we find a thought for them? Yet is this world a hospital, where they who tend and they who prescribe are themselves patients, and where the great Physician of all was once Himself the chiefest Sufferer.

The appalling aggregate of misery in the midst of which we are compelled to live, is formed by the pain and the grief of individuals, and can only be lessened by the efforts of individuals who must themselves swell its amount. Therefore was our Redeemer's life one long forgetfulness of His own pain; one long thought for the pain of those whom He came to save. The Love which, in agony, remembered His Blessed Mother, and thought upon the Beloved Disciple, was but the fuller example of the same Love which had bade Him journey, in weariness, from city to city, often without shelter, even at times without leisure to eat bread; that by teaching the ignorant, and healing the sick, He might soften the woes of a guilty world. In the hour of great anguish He felt, though He suffered; but it was because He had taught Himself to feel whilst He was suffering.

And we may learn to do likewise. Exertions

made in weariness, because others are weary also ; kindness shown in illness, because others are alike suffering ; self-restraints, which hide our own grief in the presence of greater,—these are the efforts by which, at length, we may teach ourselves thorough self-forgetfulness.

As the railing of the malefactor was the expression of human nature, so the tenderness of Christ was the expression of the Divine nature. Let us place our little cross beneath that of our merciful Saviour, and infinite as must be the distance between us, it may be that through His grace, by looking at Him, we shall learn to be like Him.

THE DUE REWARD OF OUR DEEDS.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 40, 41.

“ But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due rewards of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.”

“ WE receive the due reward of our deeds ! ” That sounds like a natural acknowledgment of a self-evident truth; yet a deep lesson must have been learnt before it was made, and one which, if we look into our own hearts, we shall probably find we have by no means acquired ourselves. There is nothing—literally nothing, which we are so slow in learning, as the justice of punishment. Hell is far more a matter of faith than heaven; and even after years of wilful sin men will not admit it to be their due reward.

There can indeed be no doubt that every offence is increased in exact proportion to the condition of the Being against whom it is committed. A sin against an Infinite Being must therefore, we may say, be an Infinite sin, demanding an Infinite punishment, or an Infinite atonement. But whilst

we thus speak we use words which we do not understand, and even if they were understood, there are other and subtler questions to perplex us, which on this side the grave can never be solved.

Our fears and our wishes do in fact confuse our reason, which would otherwise clearly teach us to put all such questions aside. For standing apart, looking,—as we may imagine an angel might look,—upon this fallen world; seeing the total ignorance of mankind, as to many of the elementary facts of nature, and the utter incapacity of the human intellect to comprehend that which is Divine;—we should naturally argue that in accepting the evidence of revelation, we necessarily accept its doctrines; and that when God says that He will inflict a certain punishment upon sinners, the very fact of the threat is sufficient, according to the common rules upon which we daily act, to render us liable to it if we disregard it.

When a warning is given, there can at least be no injustice towards the individual who sets it at defiance, and suffers in consequence. And it is a fearful thought that at the last Great Day, we may seek to save ourselves from our doom by saying that we could not see how the sins we had committed could deserve so awful a punishment, and be met with the reply that our ignorance in no way lessened our responsibility; that the words which speak of Hell do unquestionably tell of an awful punishment awaiting the sinner, and

that when once heard or read, they rendered us answerable for the acts by which we had incurred it.

But the hardness of the human heart needs a stronger power than reason to subdue it to the acknowledgment of its own deserts. We accept in faith, but we cannot bring ourselves to feel that punishment so great is the due, the inevitable reward, of our deeds. Let us then for a moment take our own view of the case, and ask ourselves,—if, after wilful sin, whether great or small, we do *not* deserve eternal punishment, what is it we do deserve?

Is it God's love? Not the love which is bestowed upon all whom He creates, and which we may think is inseparably connected with the act of creation,—but the individual love, which may perhaps be more rightly termed His favour:—does wilful sin deserve this? If not, then it deserves the contrary.—To be out of God's favour; what does it involve? There are thousands, millions, who do not care to think. The sun shines as brightly, the air is as pure, the forests are as green, the flowers as radiant, to the sinner as to the saint. If conscience speaks too loudly, there are excitements to drown it; if the heart sinks in lonely terror, there are friends to cheer it. Men buy and sell, they eat and drink, they marry and are given in marriage; and life is so precious, and the world, even in its ruined state, so fair, that they can afford, or think they can afford, to stifle the inquiry. Only

if asked they *must* own, they cannot help owning, that whatever that favour of God may be, they have no right to it:—that so far, at least, punishment must and would be just.

Once more then let us ask what that punishment would involve.

It has been brought forward as an illustration against the arguments of those who would look upon God only as a God of benevolence, without the will or the power to inflict punishment, that we bear about with us an apparatus of torture, in the very delicacy and sensitiveness of the net-work of our nerves; and whether the illustration is admitted or not, it is certain that, in like manner, we bear about with us, even now, the apparatus for our eternal punishment.

We cannot see it, we seldom feel it, except when at times some touch awakens a keenness of anguish, which warns us, quickly though it may pass, of what hereafter we may be capable of enduring. The dreary desolation of heart which succeeds some act of wilful sin, the blank dread which accompanies the awakening of conscience, are followed now, either by the recklessness which drowns anguish in false mirth, or by the penitence which finds consolation at the foot of the Saviour's Cross. But there is no such mirth beyond the grave; and the consolation of the Cross of Christ will cease with the sorrow and the sin of a guilty world. The desolation then felt, will be felt for ever; the dread then awakened will never sleep again.

It cannot ! The power of regaining the favour of God, when it has been lost, belongs exclusively to a state of probation ; and probation ceases with time. Argue therefore as we may, upon the extent of the punishment we have deserved, there is a suffering, which, by the universal consent of reasoning beings, is inseparably connected with sin, and in itself involves the misery of hell.

The just reward of our deeds ! May God save us from it ; for we know not what it is !

But perhaps we have been saved from the worst agonies of a guilty conscience ; perhaps we have been so shielded, watched, guided, that our path, from our baptism onwards, has ever been brightened (though too often the brightness may have been clouded), with the smile of our Redeemer's Love. Then, if we would know what the suffering of that great loss, that eternal privation must be, let us think what we should feel, if we were told that the smile of God's approval would never again be ours ; that His Face was turned away from us ; that our loving Saviour would never again listen to us ; that the Blessed Spirit would never again soothe us ; that we might cry, but none would answer ; that we might weep, but none would comfort us ; that we might knock at the gates of Glory, but they would for ever be closed against us ; that we might gaze wistfully, longingly, and catch the echoes of the angels' songs of welcome, and see the white robes of the Redeemed, as they passed onwards in the hour of their triumph ; but that no

step would pause, and no eye turn to look upon us ; that our name was lost to the memories of Heaven, and—what more should we need to tell us that our life from thenceforth must be—Hell ?

That we ourselves own to be a just and inevitable punishment for the least of our wilful and unpardoned sins. When God tells us of the many stripes reserved for those which are the greatest, who can dare do aught, but bow himself to the dust in awe, praying that, for Christ's sake, he may be spared.

May we indeed be enabled so to pray, when the terrors of such possibilities appal us ; for so may we be comforted by the hope that the punishment we thus dread may never be inflicted,—that the favour we thus fear to lose may never be taken away from us !

REST.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 42, 43.

“ And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”

THAT prayer and its acceptance make our hearts thrill, even in our coldest moments, with longings for the same assurance. Rest and safety! and with Him! It seems there could be nothing more to wish for; *seems* only, for doubtless there would be, since progression is one of the great laws of our being; and glory is promised for the completion of happiness; but in our present state of imperfection, the thought of glory is inseparably connected with the thought of temptation; and with temptation, how can there be rest? The Joy which we scarcely dare allow our thoughts to dwell upon now, because the overpowering rush of delight must be followed by the crushing sense of shame, scarcely comes to us as an object of desire. What we seek is quietness, freedom from danger; and only when we have become accustomed to that can we look

forward to the rapturous bliss which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive."

But, fully to appreciate the rest of Paradise, we must understand and realise the unrest of earth; and this, perhaps, is what few do. The uneasiness which we bear about with us, is to our hearts what the weight of the atmosphere is to our bodies. It meets us on all sides with a pressure so equal that we are not conscious of it, except by its unexpected increase or diminution. This is especially the case with the unrest occasioned by the necessity of watching against sin. When we are struggling against some particular temptation, we feel keenly the burden and weariness of the watch which we are required to keep; but we are not aware that, if we are at all living in the consciousness of duty and responsibility, we are keeping that watch continually. It has become habitual to us, even like the care which we exercise in our common actions. If we could remove ourselves from earth, and look down, merely as ignorant spectators, upon its inhabitants, one of the most surprising facts that could meet our view would be the unconcern with which men act and move in the midst of innumerable dangers, and the amount of enjoyment they extract from an existence which, at any moment, may be cut short by some fatal accident. It would appear like the indifference of fools; but the truth is, that we, whose actions are carried on, seemingly, without a thought of fear, are really living in incessant watchfulness.

We never move, we never eat or drink, without being on our guard against danger. Life, even in the hours of deepest mental and physical repose, is nothing but the wakeful forgetfulness of the tired watcher by the bed of sickness. We are not aware of it, because it has become part of our nature; but if the sense of danger was taken away, if we could move without the probability of stumbling, and exercise the functions of our bodies without the possibility of injury, we should imagine ourselves gifted with new senses. What we had before called ease, would be discovered to have been the most wearing anxiety; what we had termed repose, would be acknowledged to have been an unceasing perception of danger.

And so it is with the soul. The consciousness of the presence of sin, and the danger which springs from it, is, if we are living the life of God's children, the source of an unceasing and most exhausting watchfulness. We are always standing on the defensive. Like the Jews who laboured with Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem, "every one of us, with one of our hands is compelled to work in the work, and with the other hand to hold a weapon." Apart from the temptation to sin, in action or in word, there is the watch upon the innermost heart, which never for one moment can be safely allowed to slumber. If our thoughts are evil, there is the struggle to purify them; if they are good, there is the fear lest evil should mingle with them; whilst

the grasp by which we retain them is so slight, that even in the act of consciousness they are gone. The fiercest conflicts, and the greatest and most humiliating defeats, are experienced in that hidden region into which only the Eye of God can penetrate, and which only His aid can reach; and the very quickness with which conscience warns us that sin is near, shows that in this world it can never know the full meaning of rest.

Never—not even in the immediate Presence of God—not even in the fullest enjoyment of His Love. There is rest to the heavy-laden with sin, in the sense of a Saviour's forgiveness; and rest to the heart which has struggled and conquered, in the humble but perfect trust in His favour. There is a calm to the wearied spirit when, ere it sinks to sleep, it looks up in loving confidence to an Almighty Protector; and repose,—deep, yet living as the foretaste of Heaven,—in the blessedness of communion at Christ's altar; but with all,—in, about, and inseparably connected with all,—is the unconscious, yet sleepless and abiding sense of danger.

In Paradise is no danger; therefore, in Paradise alone is there rest.

“To-day shalt thou be with Me.” Can it be possible? To-day! with its cares, its business, its projects, thoughts for others,—fears for them,—fears also for ourselves. To-day! with its anxious wandering prayers, its hasty meditations, its weak

struggles, its humiliating defeats, its far-reaching anticipations of greater failures;—this very day—may there indeed be rest?

Lord, teach us to long for it. Teach us to yearn for that unspeakable calm, that perfect, untroubled safety!

And that we may so yearn for it, let us now,—though but for a few moments,—remain in perfect stillness, and, bringing before us the presence of our Saviour, trust ourselves to Him, and think of it.

No sin, no fear, no struggle—only the feeling of love!

It does not overwhelm us. It is not like the blue sky, which dazzles us with its brilliant depth, as it looks through the white clouds on a summer's day. It falls upon our hearts as the shade of the forest, when the sunlight, gleaming on the leaves, is regarded only as adding to the fulness of our repose.

But the malefactor, in his anguish, asked to be remembered by Christ in His Kingdom; and the Saviour promised Him, not a kingdom—but rest; and it may be that we dare not wish for more.

If so, yet may we look forward to it for ever. Crowns of triumph, the victorious songs of the redeemed, and the hallelujahs of the sinless angels—glad and glorious indeed must they be; and if they should one day be ours, our nature will be so strengthened as to enable us to bear the ecstasy of joy. But the rest which begins in Paradise will

follow us as we enter into Heaven, as the most precious blessing which even the Omnipotence of God can bestow for it is the rest of the unalterable love of Jesus, our Crucified Saviour.

“Like as the heart panteth after the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God.”

DARKNESS.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 44, 45.

“And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.”

THE short narrative of our blessed Lord's death, contained in the Gospels, is, without doubt, an evidence of Divine inspiration. Though condensed into such few words, it has been, and will continue to be, the text of years of study and comment; and every one, reading it for himself, must feel how much there is in the details which he has never fully considered, or even attempted to consider.

No doubt the effect of the manner in which this part of the Bible, especially, is written, is to induce a much more careful study than would be attempted if the account was given in the style and language of a human composition. Hundreds of intellectual minds, who, if all had been described in full and consecutive detail, would have read the history, and then put it aside as requiring no study, and, therefore, exciting but little interest, have, we may believe, been led by the very brevity of the

Scripture narrative to search more deeply into its meaning, and thus more earnestly to appreciate its purport.

A connection, which does not at first strike the mind, may, perhaps, by such a search, be found in the horror of the three hours of darkness, and the effect which such an interruption of the ordinary laws of nature appears to have produced on the minds of the people.

We may not, perhaps, have ever thought whether it was likely to create any such impression; yet when we read afterwards that the people smote their breasts, and returned to their own homes, we can scarcely help imagining that something more than the sight of physical agony must have produced so deep a remorse; and it can scarcely be a forced connection of cause and effect which bids us look upon that terrible darkness as an instrument used by God's Providence to bring before them the greatness of their guilt. There is in human nature an instinctive horror of darkness,—not exclusively based upon or supported by reason, although we are apt to imagine that it is. If we could be assured, without the possibility of doubt, that no danger could befall us, darkness would yet bring awe, if not terror. A person totally blind does not, indeed, feel this awe, but it is because he is surrounded by the sense of light; that which others see, he too sees in imagination, and therefore darkness to him ceases to be darkness, but if he knew that the whole world was,

like himself, buried in darkness external to them, the same awe which they felt would probably be his likewise.

For darkness is the most perfect of all types, the most real of unrealities. Nothing in itself, it yet teaches the deepest moral truths,—truths which we actually could not understand without it. If we only consider the words which we utter in our daily conversation, the common terms which are so familiar to us that we use them without thinking of their derivation or their meaning, we shall find that, without darkness, we should have lost the power of conveying to ourselves, and impressing upon others, the greatness of the guilt and the due horror of certain sins. A wicked deed, a guilty deed, a sinful deed—they are all terms expressive of evil actions; but a dark deed rouses a feeling which none of those epithets could reach. It does so because darkness is, as we at once feel, complete and final. Light, the most dazzling which we can now behold, is but the faint representation of a light which may be intensified till it destroys the power of sight; and that light is but the shadow of the Glory in which no man can live. But perfect darkness cannot, to our sense, be more dark. When the Bible would describe it as supernatural, it has recourse to another sense, and speaks of “a darkness which might be felt.” We may be sure that there is great mercy in this fact. We are all children, requiring to be taught by the things we actually see and feel; and,

liable as we must always be to be carried away by the frivolities of the moment, and incapable, as so many are, of any real exercise of thought, any power of imagination or abstract reasoning, we could not receive the elementary truths of our probationary existence but for the external pictures,—the types of nature—which affect our physical being, and by that means open the way for the spiritual lesson to be conveyed to the heart. The blessing of God's Presence; how far short of the real idea to be conveyed is any description but that which speaks of it as Light! The loss of God's Presence; how little can we understand what it implies till we speak of it as Darkness!

The awe which darkness inspires is, therefore most necessary and salutary. We may smile at it as superstitious, but we can never destroy it by reason. The instinct of the child when it dreads the dark is more true than the professed indifference of the grown-up man; and better far will it be for us to acknowledge the truth, and, dealing with ourselves as children, seek support where children seek it; than to scoff at it, until we find, too late, that the fear which we have despised has become our tyrant. For there is a darkness which must overtake us all—the darkness of death—a literal and felt darkness, as real as that which gathered around the Saviour in His last agony. And as the hour of that darkness woke the consciences of the guilty people, so will the hour of the darkness of death, as we

perceive it stealing over us, awake our consciences if we have not sought light in Christ.

We say to the child, when in its trembling terror it clings to us, that there is no fear, because its mother is near to guard it. If we are wise, we say also, that even were that presence removed, there is another and a higher Protection which can never be taken from it. We tell of the loving Eye of God, and the ceaseless watch of the holy angels; and, comforted by our words, the child turns again to rest, for darkness has lost its terror, and in dreams it thinks of the morning.

And the rest of the grave, the quiet sinking to sleep in love, the bright dreams of the glorious awakening, shall they not be ours also, if, in the hour of our great darkness, we can repeat the child's lesson, and exercise the child's faith?

We rehearse that last trial many many times during the course even of a short life. We watch the stealing onwards of night at the close of every day; we lay ourselves down to rest, conscious that light has fled, and that we have passed into a world "lying in darkness." Perhaps, for a moment, we feel awe-struck, but our wearied eyes close in forgetfulness, and the lesson which God would teach us is lost. What if every night—nay, more, if every evening of our lives, as light vanishes and shadows gather around us—we were to force ourselves to read the types presented to us! What if we realised to ourselves that darkness was the image of death, and that death without Christ would be

darkness for ever! Would it terrify us—would it sadden us—would it render existence so solemn that we should be unfitted for its duties? We may think so, but it can scarcely be a right thought; else wherefore has God given to darkness, which is the type of death, and, therefore, necessarily awful, so great a dominion over the earth? Why do we not live in continued light—why, at least, are not the days always long, and the nights always short? Why is it necessary that even what we call light should be, in itself, only a lesser darkness?

May it not be, because darkness—terrible in itself,—may, if we will, be converted into a great blessing; because it teaches us more than light; because it appeals more to our sense of helplessness, and speaks to us more powerfully in its stern warnings. What man would have been without darkness, who can venture to imagine? how proud, how self-reliant, how wanting in faith, and trust, and gratitude? What we ourselves should pray to be with it, the Spirit of God will teach us as we think of the darkness which shrouded the dying agony of Christ, and the confidence with which He commended His Soul to God.

“Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon His God.

FAITH.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 46.

“ And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit ; and having said thus, He gave up the ghost.”

MORE unspeakably soothing are these words than even the blessed promise of Paradise ; more so because they tell not of rest after conflict, which, perhaps, we can scarcely picture to ourselves, but of rest in the midst of conflict, which is what at this moment all who are striving to serve God must more or less be yearning after. One of the sternest lessons to be learnt at the outset of our Christian life is the necessity of continual exertion. To labour, however vigorously, for a while, and then to cease, seems within our power ; but to labour till death, is a prospect at which the heart, aware of its own weakness, must always tremble. Many there are who can never bring themselves to the state of steadfast resolution which such a necessity demands ; whose Christian life is always beginning, and whose whole course is in consequence a succession of feeble and, too frequently, unsuccessful

struggles; whilst the progress which they may be really making is hidden from them by the consciousness of the infirmity of their will. To such persons religion, with all its blessedness, must be, in a measure, dreary, because it is infinitely disappointing; and so, also, is it dreary to those who imagine that they can find in their own strength—the firmness of their own purpose—that witness of a good conscience without which there is no peace. The strength of the strongest resolution, the firmness of the most earnest purpose, what is it? Pray, strive, watch, we may, indeed; yet must there be still the frequently recurring sense of defeat, the perpetual falling short in our duty, and the ceaseless battle with self. How we bear it as we do we may well marvel! God's Spirit, doubtless, supports even those who are labouring with imperfect views of their true position, with efforts misdirected, though earnest; but notwithstanding the support given us, we can never know the repose of Trust, until the thought present to our Redeemer, when sinking under the weary anguish of the Cross, comes to us also in the weariness of our daily conflict with sin.

“Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.” What we give to God He will assuredly keep, and what He keeps must be in safety. There is no rest for the soul except in this confidence. The strictest watchfulness, the most unwearied exertion, can only bring out more clearly to view the need for increased repentance, and renewed care, until the

helplessness of human nature sinks overwhelmed by such a prospect. But to commend our souls to Christ, whether we call the act Faith, or Trust, is to turn aside from all this anxiety, and to seek for repose where only it can be found,—apart from ourselves.

The feeling need not necessarily be accompanied by any crushing sense of guilt, though it will be generally connected with the perception of infirmity and danger. At times even physical weakness will cause the same burden of anxiety to fall upon us, bringing with it the same craving for repose; and we are not called upon to examine whence it comes. The prayer of trust, which gives us rest, gives us at the same time the consciousness that we are not wilful self-deceivers, and, therefore, without a claim to it. No one can calmly and steadfastly commend his soul to Christ's keeping who does not at the moment—whatever may be his usual infirmity of will—fully desire to serve Christ. The faith which gives itself to God is inseparable from the loving gratitude which can only be satisfied with striving to please Him. The child who looks up to its mother before closing its eyes in sleep, and with an earnest truthfulness commends itself to her care, cannot have the heart of an alien; if it had, it could not trust; and if aware of any hidden fault, any cloud which had arisen to shut out love, it could not rest until the fault had been acknowledged and the resolution of amendment made. It is, indeed, quite possible to deceive ourselves on this point. Nothing is

more easy than to say that we trust in Christ, and cast the burden of our sins upon Him; and, rejecting our own righteousness, look to him only for salvation. And the words may come so readily, that we may have no difficulty in persuading ourselves that we have embraced the right doctrine, and that, therefore, our souls are safe. Or we may, under the influence of some sudden impulse or overpowering conviction of our sinfulness in God's sight, grow frightened at the thought of being in any way responsible for our salvation, and turn with thankfulness to the promise, that if we will commit ourselves to Christ, the responsibility will be taken from us. But the formal words, as being mere words, can give no rest to the conscience; and the feeling which has been suddenly awakened may as suddenly pass, and leave us as we were before. The faith which commends itself to God, and finds rest, is faith in the midst of conflict; which does not escape from the struggle with sin, but is exercised in the fiercest hour of battle. The keener, the more constant, are our efforts after holiness, the deeper will be our sense of the rest of faith. We commend our souls to God, because we find that we have no power to guard them ourselves. That is a truth which we can never learn until it has been taught us by the warfare against the evil in our hearts; but when it is learnt, the battle which we are waging will no longer oppress us. True, the fight must continue unceasingly on this side the grave; but one thought,—that Christ

is guarding us, that we are safe because we pray Him to keep us so;—and let the trial be what it will, we shall have peace. We may struggle, but when the struggle is over, we shall turn aside from the painful recollection of the weakness we have shown, and, commending our souls to Christ, feel that, whatever may be the infirmity of our purpose, in Christ's keeping we are secure. Even after defeat there is the same comfort, though it may not be found with the same ease. To be defeated implies, at least, that we have in some degree fought; and with this one condition, we can never seek without finding that which we long for. For labour and struggle are essential to the very perception of rest; and as the necessity of faith can only be taught by the experience of our own sinfulness, so as the struggle against evil grows stronger, the power as well as the need of the rest of faith becomes greater.

What words that were ever spoken give so deep, so abiding a sense of security and repose as those of our most Blessed Redeemer, uttered in His last conflict with Satan and with Death? From that overpowering anguish His Spirit turned to His Almighty Father; and when He had commended His soul to Him, He entered upon rest for ever. So may it be, also, even now with ourselves, under the anguish of a reproachful conscience, or the heart sickening dread of failure. The words, "Into Thy hands I commend My spirit," may at such seasons recur, to tell of love

which cannot fail, and confidence which can never be disappointed; and when the last conflict comes to us, as it did to our Redeemer, we may once more commend our souls to God, to find rest at length—not in faith, but in the enjoyment of Love for ever.

TRUE AND FALSE CONSISTENCY.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 47.

‘Now when the centurion saw what was done, He glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.’

THE characteristics of the Roman Centurions, mentioned in the New Testament, are remarkable.* Raised, probably, to their position of authority, on account of well-trying fidelity; they appear to have possessed a peculiar simplicity and integrity of character, which rendered them well-fitted for the reception of the Gospel. Having honestly acted up to the light which they had already received, more was mercifully vouchsafed them. This, which is the general law of God’s dealings with man, is, after all, the great secret of improvement:—to have no wilfully indulged bias, whether of feeling or of principle; when we see our path of duty, to follow it in simplicity; and when we do not see it, to pray earnestly that we may be enabled to do so; and above all, to search our hearts, with a true desire to discover whether it is any secret sin or hidden inclination which causes our perplexity.

But how few possess this integrity of heart!

* Blunt’s Scriptural Coincidences.

How extremely difficult it is to be thus honest with ourselves; and how rare to find the same honesty in others! One cause of this doubleness of character may be traced to the false estimate which is formed of what is commonly called consistency. Persons who profess high principle, and desire to be outwardly consistent, know that a certain line of conduct is expected of them; it is, therefore, their wish and interest to see things as they have always seen them; to act as they have always acted; and upon this follows the temptation, when other views of duty are suggested, to turn away from them without examining their claims. Now the Roman Centurion was, in a certain degree, inconsistent. He publicly owned the innocence of Him, over whose punishment he had just presided; and laid himself open to the charge of favouring the enemy of his government, and of bringing, indirectly, an accusation of injustice against the ruler whose sentence he had carried out. And he was not called upon to bear his testimony to the innocence of Christ; it was too late to save Him; and to own it was but to thrust himself into danger. But the Centurion was evidently what we are accustomed to express by the term, "honest-minded." What was before his eyes he saw, and what he saw he acknowledged; and though such characteristic may not at once strike us as very valuable, or very difficult to cultivate, we should learn deep lessons of wisdom if we were to set ourselves heartily to attain it.

We call consistency a virtue, and we dread to be inconsistent. How does this dread operate upon us? We have made certain professions of belief, and we do some things and leave others undone, because they would be inconsistent with those professions. We know that a certain line of conduct is expected of us,—we speak, and act, and teach, accordingly. The question we put to ourselves is not whether it would be true or right to do otherwise, but merely would it be consistent? We have made, in fact, an idol of what we suppose to be consistency, and we cannot do otherwise than fall down and worship it. And where then is sincerity?

God forbid that we should believe consistency and sincerity incompatible. They are, in fact, one and the same; but consistency, which dwells apart from sincerity, is no consistency. It may bear the outward form; but it is but a hollow image, worse than worthless. To be consistent before God is to search and pray for the knowledge of truth above all other knowledge; and when called upon by duty, to acknowledge where we have found it. But this is not man's idea of consistency, and thus it happens, that to be blamed for inconsistency is often one of our severest trials, as it is one of our most needful lessons.

The principle on which the Roman Centurion acted was truth, and yet the way in which it was displayed might almost have appeared untruth. As it has been said, he owned our Lord to be

righteous, though he had a few moments before been instrumental in his punishment as unrighteous, and this when he must have known the scoff to which he would subject himself when he returned to his former associates. Severe, indeed, would be the trial of their ridicule, and strong the temptation to conceal his own convictions, and be what he had before professed himself—an unbeliever. And if he had been in any way double-minded he would unquestionably have yielded. The Bible, indeed, tells us no more of his future life; but the bold acknowledgment made in the presence of the people leaves us little cause to doubt that he was equally bold in the presence of his more immediate companions. The very sense of duty, the very uprightness of character which had placed him in his position of authority, and compelled him to carry out even the stern sentence of death, would lead him to be as true, as upright, when reason and conscience warned him that he had been participating in a crime. Because he acted up to his heathen light, we have every reason to believe that he was admitted to the light of Christianity. And this was his consistency; it was in principle, and not merely in action.

The lesson may come home to us all; for the perplexities which crowd our path, and the doubts as to our duty, too often arise from this one cause,—the wish to be consistent apart from sincerity,—apart from that internal truth, without which truth that is external can never be found by us in the

writings of men, — in history, philosophy ; — or even, we may venture to say, in Revelation.

Let us ask, then, as the first step towards the attainment of true consistency—what are we in ourselves ? what are our principles, our motives, our wishes ? what is it after which we are striving ? what is it which we really believe would be a good if it could be obtained ? These questions, we may at first turn from in despair, as we stand at the entrance of the dark chamber of our hearts, and strive vainly to pierce into its depths. But the analogy of nature may here, as elsewhere, give us courage. The search into our hearts is indeed a search into a darkened chamber. At first we discover nothing.—we can but stumble forward, feeling, without seeing what is contained there ; but the eye, by degrees, becomes accustomed to the shadow ; outlines become distinct, even differences of shade are at last perceptible ; and far more than this, God's Spirit gives strength to our natural sight, and clearness, even to our intellectual vision, until at length we see, though still "as in a glass, darkly," the true forms of the feelings, principles, and convictions which crowd the hidden dwelling. In that knowledge is the secret of truth, as regards ourselves, and according to its agreement with that truth will be the consistency of our conduct in the sight of God.

For we must remember, that to men we shall still be what we have always been. They have formed their opinions, probably with justice, ac-

ording to the facts presented to them. They say that we think and are, what they suppose us to think and be. The supposition may be true,—it may be false; but the only idea of consistency which they can gain, is from the agreement of our conduct with the principles and the character they have *imagined* for us. Woe be to us if we allow ourselves to be guided by it! No greater unreality can be found than in the lives of those who desire only to be what the world or their friends say they are. If we would know whether such false consistency may be found in us, we might do well to inquire truly of our own hearts, whether, like the Roman Centurion, we could,—under the convictions of an honest heart,—bear to be inconsistent.

That is an inquiry, even more needful, perhaps, in these days, for the earnest-minded, than for the thoughtless. So much of fashion—of party spirit, is to be found in the religion of the day—so many things are done, or left undone, not according to principle or conviction, but simply because such a course of conduct is expected of us; so many of us there are who shrink from uttering a protest against things which, in our hearts, we condemn, and who even do that which our conscience disallow, because those with whom we have linked ourselves, will call us faint-hearted and cowardly, if we stand aloof. We have so little faith in the power of truth! Like Uzzah, we believe that the Ark of God's Church requires the miserable sup-

port of our weak arm; and we stretch forth our hands to save it; unconscious that, by that very act, we are profaning the Holy Tabernacle for the safety of which we profess to be so zealous.

Outward consistency is an undeniable good; but if it is purchased at the price of truth and sincerity, it becomes an equally undeniable evil. If the Roman Centurion had been consistent in the sight of his fellow-creatures, he would never have acknowledged Christ.

SELF-PUNISHMENT.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 48.

“And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts and returned.”

SORROW when the deed is done, and we are beginning to feel the consequences! That is very common with us all; so common and so frequent, that at last our faith in the feeling is completely shaken, and we cease to receive comfort from it. As children, it was sufficient to say, “I am sorry;” we felt as though in that acknowledgment lay a sufficient claim to forgiveness. Now it is far different. “I am sorry” has been said so often,—really felt so often,—it seems that something more is necessary; not of course, for atonement, but to satisfy ourselves that we are in earnest. Here is probably to be found the true origin of penance. It would appear to be a mistake to imagine that it necessarily implies anything like deficient trust in a Saviour. We punish ourselves to satisfy ourselves,—not to satisfy God; and the longing for this relief is at times very strong. Occasions there are when it would be an unspeakable comfort to be able to undergo some great suffering or humili-

ation, if only to persuade ourselves that we have not actually lost the power of enduring. The feeling may, and doubtless has been perverted, but it is a true natural instinct of the human heart, when aroused to the consciousness of its own miserable self-deception, and as such we may not venture to overlook it.

For in seasons of self-examination and repentance, though we may not have the slightest doubt of our own sincerity, though our feelings, when they come under review, may be undeniably real, we must yet be well aware that they are uncertain and intangible; they are ours now, to morrow they may be gone. If strength of principle is to go with them, where is our safety? Action therefore must be the test; but action is the test of the present, and the sin we dread lies in the past and the future. How, in such cases, shall we know that our sorrow is sincere, and that we may reasonably hope if similar temptation should recur, not to fall away again in like manner?

This is no easy question to answer, when we know the treachery of our own hearts; and self-denial and self-discipline would therefore seem to be the only comforting assurance of sincerity. If we can consent, voluntarily and thankfully, to suffer because we have sinned, we may hope that we are so far, in earnest, and that if tried again, we shall stand firm. Not that there can be any complete assurance even then, especially when the offence is one which we are accustomed to consider

light. To commit a sin, and to punish ourselves for it afterwards, may be to many, easier than to refrain from it altogether; and the knowledge that we can thus bring ourselves as it were to justice, after the offence, may even at length become a salve to our conscience, and so a temptation rather than a safeguard. This danger, which must always be connected with self-punishment, arises from the natural view of suffering as atonement; and hence springs the exaggerated and false view of penance, which lies at the root of so many monstrous evils in the practice of the Church of Rome. Consideration must indeed show that no amount of punishment endured by a finite being can atone for a sin committed against one who is Infinite, but few take the trouble to reason upon such points, and if they do, the intellect quickly becomes confused, and the strength of reason is lost in the subtleties of metaphysics. The same principle which leads us all to feel, that after a child has been punished for a fault, it may naturally expect forgiveness,—leads us to think in like manner, that after we have suffered for sin we may look for pardon; and this view does unquestionably, and most dangerously, interfere with the doctrine of Christ's Atonement.

Self-punishment is therefore a satisfaction to be used with great caution, and great self-distrust. It may with some minds easily degenerate into scrupulosity, with others into carelessness. But that it is a satisfaction, that the desire for it is in-

herent in our nature, and that it must therefore be intended for wise and holy purposes, can scarcely be doubted.

Perhaps it is most safely exercised in cases of habitual weakness of purpose. If, for instance, we are habitually indolent, or careless in conversation, giving way from the temptation of the moment to unkind remarks or slight irreverences; or if we find ourselves always neglecting a certain duty, or giving way to some wrong, though trifling indulgence; we may find a lawful and not dangerous support and encouragement in compelling ourselves to some act of self-discipline, which shall be at the same time a proof of our sincerity, and an exercise of our power of self-control. Sorrow in such instances is often rather fretful and disappointed than deep. We despise ourselves, but the offence, though it may be grievous in God's sight, is to ourselves scarcely sufficient to excite a keen repentance. We are discouraged, and having lost faith in ourselves in little things we have but slight hope of gaining the mastery in greater; and without hope there is but a faint effort. Thus the little sin does Satan's work often more effectually by its consequences, than a greater sin would by its immediate influence. In order to neutralise such an effect, we may perhaps wisely do something to restore our confidence in the power of our own will, and our hope of being enabled at length, through the help of the Holy Spirit, to conquer even our habitual infirmities.

And other cases there are in which self-punishment may be safe, because from the depth of our repentance, it cannot be mingled with any thought of atonement. The sin has been so great, that the crushed spirit, far from seeking to satisfy for its own guilt, can scarcely bring itself to believe even in the power of the satisfaction of Christ. In such a state of mind it is but another form of grief; like the refusal of earthly comforts, the loathing of earthly joys,—when the broken-hearted sit by the graves of the dead. It would seem cruel to deny that consolation.—Love it is which seeks it, and love may safely be trusted to guard it.

How many of us are there who have some memories which can never be effaced,—life-long sorrows for sins, which, though laid at the feet of our Redeemer, must even for that very reason, be the more bitter! Can we forget, because He, in His boundless love, has forgiven? And if we remember, shall we not desire to clothe ourselves in sack-cloth, and cover our head with ashes, mourning that we have ever so grieved Him, who is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil.” When the people who had gazed on the crucifixion of their Lord, smote their breasts as they turned away from that sight of awe; the feeling was for the moment real, and the repentance unfeigned. But with the greater number, we may fear, that the feeling fled with the day, and the repentance vanished under the shadow of the

night. Yet if there was one amongst that great multitude, converted afterwards to Christ, — can we believe that the thought of having coldly participated in His death could ever be put aside? Would not the recollection follow him, to add intensity to his humiliation, and earnestness to his labors? Would not bitter, burning tears be shed at the thought that he had in a measure shared in the murder of his Redeemer? And as, year after year, the solemn anniversary returned which even we, with our hard hearts, and at this distance of time, can never pass by unregarded, would not the deepest acts of penitence seem all too little for the guilt, which by God was forgiven and obliterated.

The sin—the one special sin (if there be such) which has lastingly burdened our conscience, and on which we scarcely venture to look back,—may it not bid us also smite our breasts, not this day only, but every day, till life shall cease; seeking, though only by some petty act of self-denial, to find relief for the thought, that by it we also have shared, peculiarly and distinctly, the sin of crucifying our Lord?

THE SAFEST REPENTANCE.

ST. LUKE, xxiii. 49.

“And all His acquaintance, and the women that followed Him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.”

THE three kinds of character described in this verse, and the two preceding, are striking illustrations of human nature, in its best but very different forms. The Centurion looking on at the awful events passing before him, with no application to himself, no personal feeling of love, but referring all to the innate standard of truth, in his own mind, and acknowledging “Certainly, this was a Righteous Man;”—the people, trembling at their own share in the guilt, penitent for the moment, but returning to their homes and their occupations;—and the women standing afar off in fear, yet riveted by love, and in the end, following to behold where He was laid.

That was a higher, purer feeling, than the sorrow of the terror-stricken people;—it must always be so. The penitence which is continually looking into the heart and smiting upon the breast, is by

no means so safe as the love which looks upon the Cross.

There may be too much of self-contemplation, even in an examination into our sins. The search into our hearts is indeed most necessary as a commencement, and must be renewed often and sincerely,—for without it, there will be no progress; but when it has been made, it would seem best to carry away the general impression of self-abhorrence as a safeguard, and a means of humiliation; and then to turn entirely from the consideration of self, and think only of Christ.

For a very subtle temptation besets us, even in our repentance,—the pleasure in our own depth of feeling, our quick perception of evil, and earnest wish to escape. These things had far better be forgotten. Sorrow for sin becomes at last, if we do not take great care,—like the weakness, which so often accompanies recovery from serious illness;—to a certain degree an unreality and affectation. People often like to continue a little ill, because they excite attention and sympathy, from the danger they have escaped. And so also we like to be sorrowful for our sins, especially if we may tell our grief to another; because we feel that the very fact of repentance makes us interesting.

There is nothing of this feeling encouraged in the teaching of the New Testament. Our Lord's warnings and rebukes are stern; His promises of forgiveness full and complete. The lingering doubt, the morbid refusal to be comforted, can

find no place in the examples which he brings before us. The prodigal son returned, was pardoned, and called to partake of the joys of his home in thankfulness,—not bidden to stand apart, dwelling upon his past misery, and doubting his present acceptance. The “weary and heavy laden” are bidden to draw nigh to Christ, and in Him to find rest—not distrust and despondency. And in the same way, the Apostles, in writing to their converts, dwell continually upon the blessedness of their condition; the free, full love of God; the Infinite Atonement offered; whilst sorrow is mentioned in connection with the sufferings of the Redeemer, rather than the remembrance of the sins which occasioned them. Even St. Paul, when in writing to the Corinthians, he describes the earnestness of their repentance for the offences which had corrupted their church, in no way brings before us that anxious self-contemplating penitence, which is so often considered essential to humility and saintliness. “Behold,” he says, “this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.” And again he adds:—“Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we, for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all.”

What can be more earnest,—yet hopeful and if one may so say,—manly, than this account of a penitence, of the reality of which none can doubt? The Corinthians were indignant with themselves. Sin was to them—what it is not always to us,—really repulsive;—and therefore they turned from it; they struggled, and fought against it; they did not sit down and contemplate it.

It may be doubted whether many among us would willingly do the same. The singular revelations of feeling, the careful analysis, and publication of different forms of spiritual experience, of sin and penitence, which are from time to time brought before us, may certainly lead us to imagine the contrary. Even the pleasure with which we read of them may lead us to suspect ourselves. Nothing is so universally attractive as the spiritual history of another mind; it matters not what may be its imperfection,—even its guilt; if self-conviction and penitence accompany it, the subject is immediately invested with the most intense interest. And if this feeling can be excited with regard to other persons, can we possibly hope to escape from it in our own case? It signifies nothing that we have not the eye of the world upon us; we have all a wonderful inexplicable faculty of being the world to ourselves; of constituting ourselves, as it were, into two beings, and looking upon our individual self as though it was the self of another. And by this faculty we can, whilst deeply sensible of sin, deeply grieving

for it; even in one way hating and abhorring it, yet find a pleasure in looking upon it, because, when accompanied by penitence, it becomes interesting to us, or rather we become interesting to ourselves.

Most sadly, fearfully dangerous, is this temptation. Unless seen and overcome, it will undermine the very foundation of our religious life; for there is a falsity in the feeling which it creates, that must at last make us false, not only to the world, but to God and our own hearts.

It springs from a total misconception of sin,—a total ignorance of its real nature. Sin, when seen truly, is, in its nature and characteristics,—always, under all circumstances,—hateful, hideous, and offensive. No amount of repentance, of zeal, of self-denial, can ever render it otherwise. When we touch it, or play with it, or even approach it, we are defiled. God, “who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,” cannot look upon us, because we are tainted by it, until we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Christ the Redeemer cannot speak of it, except as that which is loathsome in its uncleanness. To gaze upon it, therefore, except to abhor and avoid it, can only be pernicious. To think of it as belonging to us may indeed excite our horror; it may humble us, and lead us to repentance; but when we have repented, to linger over the recollection of it, is but to cherish what God bids us forget.

To linger over it,—not, to remember it. Sin

should never be forgotten. If we are truly penitent, it never can be; but it should be seen as the Apostle would teach us to see it,—in the sufferings of our Redeemer; not in the contemplation of our own misery. The self-reproach we have felt,—the tears we have shed,—the burden of regret which memory still retains,—what real value can they have? Be the sorrow the most agonizing, the tears the most bitter, the burden the most heavy which man in his extremest penitence has ever brought as an offering to his Maker,—they are all in themselves worthless. Sin dwells with them, sin taints them,—and sin is hideous.

But there is One, whose sinless agony was infinite, whose tears were Divine, whose burden was “the iniquity of us all.” “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.” If we would repent with a safe repentance,—let us stand by the Cross on which He hung, and there, looking upon Him,—mangled, motionless, lifeless,—pour out the fulness of our repentance, and the inmost sorrow of our hearts. Not for ourselves, not for our disappointed hopes, our lost purity, the stained garments of our baptismal covenant, but for Him do we mourn,—because He suffered, because He died. Sorrowful indeed may be that lamentation; bitter and enduring as the cry of the stricken daughters of Jerusalem. “The Lord hath

done that which He had devised ; He hath fulfilled His word, that He had commanded in the days of old ; He hath thrown down, and hath not pitied ; and He hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee. He hath set up the horn of thine adversaries. For this, our heart is faint ; for these things, our eyes are dim ; remembering the affliction and the misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to mind ; therefore have I hope."

Hope ! yes,—that must be the end of the repentance, in which no self-deception mingles,—the humility in which no thought of pride can linger. Love, which forgets itself, which is not kept back, even by the knowledge of its unworthiness, will be the love of heaven ; and therefore must we pray that it may be our love on earth.

When the Redeemer asked of St. Peter,—“ Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me ? ” the heart of the conscience-stricken disciple might still have bidden him tremble and doubt, ere he replied ; for who could love Christ, yet deny him ? But the joy of the Presence of his risen Lord, the depth of gratitude and devotion, blotted out even that bitter memory of sin ; and fervent, and deep, from the very fulness of his affection, came the answer of him who was forgiven,—“ Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee.”

May God in His mercy grant us the blessedness of that same answer,—even when, like the sorrowing women, we stand afar off, in our penitence “beholding the things which have been done for us.”

THE END.



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