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FOUR SERMONS.

Each of these Sermons is published by request, and is here presented, as it was delivered, without revision.

EASTER, 1880.

FOUR SERMONS

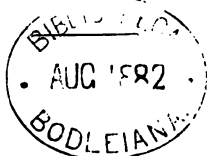
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BY THE REV.

T. HOWARD TWIST, M.A.,

Vicar of S. Michael's.

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SERMON I.

THE GREATNESS OF CHARITY.

Preached on Quinquagesima Sunday, 1877.

1 Cor. XIII. 13.

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.”

THESE words close the Apostle's great “song of love,” as it has been well called. The value of such words on the last Sunday before the great Lenten fast—and indeed the value of the whole Epistle for this day—cannot but be apparent to those who consider what it is that all Religious observances are meant to foster. The Church knows well the danger of mere outward observance. The mortification of self is surely nothing unless it imply likewise the growth of devotion towards God and love towards our fellow-men. Nay, there is a danger even in the very thought of self-mortification, lest it should.

lead to the absorption of all powers of mind and soul upon self alone. Hence it is that we are at once reminded—first, of the aim of all Religious duty and observance—viz., *love*, love towards God and man ; secondly, of our need of wide-heartedness in Religious duty—lest we become mere morbid dwellers upon our own hearts' feelings and needs ; and thirdly, that our Religious observance is to be neither standard nor condemnation for others, but all are to be treated and thought of by us with that charity which hideth away even another's faults. Greater than the faith which leads us to do in Religious duty—greater than the hope which directs all Religious observance to the everlasting reward of the children of God—greater than all, and the very end of all—is Love, Charity !

But, useful as their Lenten application may be, my brethren, the words of the Apostle present on the very surface a teaching wider far than this. We may well direct our thoughts this morning to their great principle—that *love* is the greatest of all Christian graces—of all God's gifts. “ And now abideth, faith, hope, charity, “ these three ; but the greatest of these is “ Charity.”

There is an apparent difficulty in thus placing one Christian grace above others. We all know how by natural character some men are distinguished by one virtue, others by others. Society has need of men of every shade of virtuous natural character. The man of careful prudence has no less a fitting place in social life than has the man of quick and generous impulse. Men are busy and practical, or they are thoughtful and meditative; they are men of broad aims and views, or they are men of minute attention to the details of some narrow field. They work together in society; and it may be truly said the world could not get on without the many varieties of character, because the very variety induces co-operation, and each has something to supply which others lack. But it would on this very account seem difficult for us to say which of the many virtues contributing to the general well-being should be placed pre-eminent.

And again, it may be urged that in the individual character any one virtue out of proportion with others may become a weakness. Take for example, great courage. If not guarded by other and opposite points of character, it may be nothing better than a daring rudeness. So again,

reverence may become superstition; gentleness relapse into feebleness. We require something of harmony—balance—in our moral nature to keep even our virtues from taint of evil. And to maintain this proportion and harmony we require constant struggle against our natural defects and weaknesses. We need to acquire the virtues which by nature we do not possess in sufficient degree, as well as to exercise those towards which we have a natural bent. How, then, may one virtue be urged as greater than another, or than others?

Faith, hope, charity are natural virtues as well as Christian graces. Our very moral composition, so to speak, inclines more or less towards some one or more of these. We are even from our very cradle—trustful, in a greater or less degree; hopeful or desponding; wide in our sympathy and affection, or more narrowhearted. Life helps to strengthen and to mould our natural bias. It may strengthen what is feeble; it may mould what is naturally out of proportion. Faith, hope, charity follow the rule of all virtues. They may be in defect; or they may be out of all harmony with the rest of our moral being. It is possible for a man to have not only no

faith, no trust in the great Unseen God ; he may have no trust in any fellow-man—his whole life being warped by suspicion just as the complexion is spoiled by jaundice. Or, he may be over-trustful, and so, credulous ; the dupe of every designer. It is possible, again, for a man to be spending his whole life in gloom, hopeless—to know nothing of the moral sunlight which would find its way to his spirit from the cheerful glow of other hearts. Or, he may be, on the other hand, imprudent through the very excess of hope—presumptuous—jumping at aims and ends to which he sees no steady path, simply from the very buoyancy of a natural disposition. It is possible, again, for a man to be so centred within himself that he has no sympathy with others. Or, he may have so vast and ready a flow of sympathy that it springs up every moment, just as a butterfly wings its way to every plant, with apparently no steady purpose. When in defect—when out of proportion and balance—faith, hope, love, lose their beauty, their greatness. They are as truly virtues of our natural character, needing the same consistent guarding, as temperance, or meekness, or courage.

How, then, brethren, should the Apostle separ-

ate one of these, and place it in pre-eminence over others? Does not this incur the very danger of want of proportion, of balance,—of which we have been speaking? Such at least might seem at first sight a difficulty. But observe that in the three virtues, faith, hope, charity, we have no opposites, no antagonism. It is not the case of separating love or courage from all other virtues, and disregarding its harmony with other moral forces. It is simply the comparison of virtues themselves so much akin as to be inter-dependent. Thus hope implies faith. If we believe not, the very ground of hope is cut from under our feet. Faith likewise implies more or less of hope. But love implies both faith and hope. We cannot *love* where we do not *trust*; every expression of our love is radiant with *hope*. It is here, my brethren, that love has the pre-eminence. Even in this rude world of ours, the natural heart, unaided by supernatural grace, knows well all the three experiences—trust, hope, love. You may in your business relations, in your every-day acquaintance, trust and hope. You may even trust almost against hope. But I ask you to recollect, brethren, if you ever *loved* without both

trust and hope ; and you know it is impossible. The little child comes boldly to the father's side with its simple request, because it loves. It believes that what it hopes for will be given. Once quench that love—and you disturb the trust and diminish the hope ; and the little child's petition will be timid and doubting. And so through every relation of life—there abide in every human breast some sparks at least of these three—faith, hope, charity. Aye, believe me, brother, when every other virtue has been seared by the fire of human sin, or corrupted by the polluting touch of a demon-lust, or swept away by the blast of some fierce passion—there abide, hidden down in the deep chambers of the soul, ready to be recalled by thy heart or mine, brother, to the salvation, the consolation of that soul—there still abide these three, faith, hope, charity—but the greatest of these is charity ! The world needs leavening with trust, for sin and wrong have bred suspicion ; and our life is none too bright that we should withhold the rays even of a far-off comfort to the sorrowing and teach them *Hope*. But we inspire both trust and hope alike if we shew men how we love as brethren ; for the greatest of all is CHARITY !

We have so far dealt with the pre-eminence of love over faith and hope in the natural character, and in its influence amongst men. It is time we regard it in its pre-eminence as the greatest spiritual gift. Every virtue is a gift—either of nature—or of providence in our training—or of the planting of the Holy Spirit of God within us. Now, when St. Paul speaks of spiritual gifts in the 10th and following chapters of this epistle, he does not of course exclude from that term the natural virtues and dispositions which become sanctified and developed by the Spirit of God; though evidently the primary reference is to the miraculous gifts of prophecy, healing, speaking with tongues, knowledge, interpretation of tongues, which were of benefit in the early Church. While these extraordinary powers availed to witness directly and forcibly to the supernatural gift of God, the graces of the Christian character as implanted by the same Spirit bore a silent testimony to the great work of our restoration to the image of God by the redemption and sanctifying work of God Himself. It was plain, as the Apostle here told the Corinthians, that a large number of the miraculous gifts must pass away—some in future

ages of the Church—all at the appearance of the great Giver. But faith, hope, love—these were abiding gifts—these should remain even throughout the everlasting ages. The miraculous gifts were but for a time for certain individuals. Faith, hope, charity were for all Christ's people in this life—for all the redeemed nations who should gather round the throne of God. Faith will be in heaven not the hand stretched out to God through the mists which encompass earthly life—but the holy confidence of fellowship with saints and angels, and an abiding trust in the purity and goodness of God's will. Hope will look ever onward to more of knowledge, more of revelation of God, to an ever-increasing joy at God's right hand. Love will be the very atmosphere of that eternal Home.

We have thus the distinction between faith, hope, and charity, as natural virtues, and as Divine gifts. As natural virtues, they reach out but to what is human, earthly, to what lies around them. When strengthened, invigorated by the Spirit of God, they have relations beyond those of this world. They long for the Eternal, the Immortal, the Invisible. Faith is no longer mere human dependence, it is the leaning of the

whole force of a man's being on One Unseen. The vision of hope is not bounded by any earthly horizon. Beyond the waves and storms of the life now—beyond the dark vale of death—it sees that whereon to gaze—even in “the land which “is very far off.” Love, unsatisfied ever by any earthly thing—seeks to find its true response above human ties ; and the heart rests at last when it rests in God.

But do not think, brethren, that because by the Spirit of God, faith, hope, love are all transfigured, strengthened, beautified, they have in their higher out-reaching, no place on earth amongst men. Nay ! they are still more human while they are more Divine ; they are more like the virtues of Him who is the Incarnate Son of God ! Thus Faith, while it works its holy lessons in society, yet overcomes the world—the evils of society. Hope, while it lights up many a dark breast with its cheerful, happy smile, is weaning each heart from earth to enjoy the peaceful and blissful anticipation of the invisible kingdom of heaven ! Charity, while it draws all its store from God, is feeding the hungry, giving the cup of cold water in the name of JESUS ! Blessed group of God's own gifts—

faith, hope, and charity! Yet let us see, brethren, that even as God's gifts, the greatest of them is Charity.

It is the greatest, first, because it is the most God-like. In the infinite supremacy of His own existence, God has no place for *trust*. He has none greater in whom to trust. Neither has He any need in point of duration, to trust on in the ages of existence for what is then to come. For with God all ages to come are as the ages that have been. He is omnipresent in the duration of existence, as He is omnipresent in the empire of space. Neither needeth He to trust His inferior creation; for He knows every breath they draw, every thought they have. Faith can have no place in the Being of God. Neither yet can *hope*. Since all is ever present with Him whose everlasting name is —“I am”—there is nothing for which Almighty God could hope. Not so love. He was Himself Love before all ages. Creation was the consequence of His love. Redemption was the gift of God's love. That love can never pass away. GOD IS LOVE.

Again, “the greatest of these is Charity,” because, brethren, the love of God simply absorbs faith and hope by drawing our whole being to

God now as its reward, its satisfaction, the everlasting object of its desire.

There seem to me to be three great laws in love—laws to which even the love of God has ever been subjected. They are the law of self-sacrifice, the law of progress, and the final law. The primary law of love is self-sacrifice. The absence of self-sacrifice in an individual, an age, or a nation annihilates love. If we love, we give of our own, we sacrifice of our own freely. Even friendship, believe me, brethren, is not strong without sacrifice. It grows, it lives solely as it is destructive of the principle of self—as it becomes devoted to the good of that other being whom we have dared to call “friend.” This is why the man is most beloved amongst his fellows who is ready for their good to give up his effort, his means, his sympathy, his help the most. Self-sacrifice is the very soul of love.

Again, there is the law of progress. Love cannot exist without growth. It must increase, it must be ever rising, it must gain fresh strength alike from gladness and from woe, it must grow deeper through happiness, deeper still through trial and sacrifice. In a word it must be continually moving, it must ever go onwards.

And last of all there is the great final law of love; final, because there comes a time when, having exhausted all its gifts, life has but one thing left to offer—ITSELF. The moment comes when, if our love to God be true, brethren, when having given intellect, fortune, time, thought, the past and the future, our love for God can take but one step more, and give itself for ever—never to recall the gift. We give up all then to Him who first gave us Himself. His sacrifice was the great example of the final law of love. “Having loved His own, He loved them unto “the end,”—this end was the very abyss of love—the final surrender of self. And it is at this surrender that faith pales away—that hope has led us to the light it sought—that love is the only one thing which the soul can know before the presence of its God. “The greatest of all is charity!”

Brethren, do you love God? Do you really love at all, beyond the ties of your own family, your own connections? Have you ever reached out your love to the great God of all love, and by sacrifice sought for His sake to gain a nearer place in the infinite love He feels?

Ah, ask this question this Lenten-tide. Let

our religion be not merely the expression of the church's creed ; not merely the vague hope of a blessed hereafter ; but let it be LOVE for man—LOVE of God—shewn by the surrender of all our own to His eternal will !

SERMON II.

THE TEN DAYS OF EXPECTATION.

Preached on the Sunday after Ascension, 1877.

ACTS I. 4.

“Wait for the promise of the Father.”

THE Ascension is that one high commemoration of our Church which has the least regard of Christian people. The reasons for this disregard are some of them social—such, for example, as that there have been few public holidays connected with Ascension-tide, and that the close proximity of Whitsuntide, which has been always observed as a holiday season, throws the festival of the Ascension into the background. But perhaps even these reasons would not be enough to stand in the way of a generally religious observance of Ascension Day, were the event commemorated on this day one which

appealed to the natural feelings. On Christmas Day our churches are thronged, our joy and gladness find ready expression, eager sympathy, even from men who seldom worship. On Good Friday we watch sadly, penitently, by the Cross, and life's business is, during the Saviour's death-hours, hushed and stilled. True, that even then there are the rude, jarring cries of the pleasure-seekers—there is the false-heartedness of many who still call themselves Christians. But yet, both on the Christmas Festival and in Good Friday's solemn remembrances, men in general, and church-people in particular, give up their business and worship Christ. And why on these days more than on Ascension Day? Because Christmas claims individual sympathy for the world-wide joy that the Son of God is born into the world. Because it speaks, too, to every household, bringing the love of God into the very midst of every family circle. Because Good Friday likewise appeals to our human sympathy. Death always moves men more or less. We cannot pass with cold hearts and averted eyes the spot where JESUS hangs in the agony of death, especially when we realise anything of the startling, yet mysterious relation

we have to that scene of bitter sorrow. But on Ascension Day the commemoration is beyond and apart from the sympathies of daily life. And so, guided by the custom of a loveless world, impelled by no natural sympathy, with no realisation of the import of Christ's Ascension, the many passed by the festival with apparent disregard; few found their way on Thursday to worship with the wondering Galileans; and the coldness of our adoration, so far at least, as its outward expression went in the earlier services, savoured rather of the spirit of Ash Wednesday than of Ascension Day. This coldness, brethren, is clearly not the desire, the intention of the Church. Ascension day has, in its assigned services, all the special marks which distinguish Christmas, Easter, Whitsun Day—special psalms and lessons, the hymn-like creed of S. Athanasias, proper Collect, Epistle, and Gospel, and proper preface in the Holy Communion Office. It was meant to be one of the very greatest of our days of worship. Having followed JESUS our LORD in all the events of His life and death and resurrection, we were on this day to celebrate the triumph of the victor. Type and prophecy had foretold the dignity, the glory

of Christ in His Ascension, and psalmists sang their pœans of high praise. From the centuries preceding, prophets and kings had desired to see those things which Christian disciples saw—which we know as familiar history—which we cherish as parts of our creed. But we who thus know, who thus are taught, who profess to love our LORD, go “one to his farm, and another to “his merchandise,” careless of His parting blessing, heedless of His opening to mankind the gate of Heaven.

You say, how little we are taught in Holy Scripture of the event of Christ’s Ascension, and you remark that these ten days following are almost like a blank in the recorded history of the Infant Church. You think that with so little inspired teaching on the *fact* of the Ascension, the event cannot be one demanding such constant and exalted commemoration. But has it not been frequently pointed out to you how little—how very few words—sum up, narrate the whole story of JESUS CHRIST. The whole gospel—you find it all in the Apostle’s Creed. The records of Christ’s life are necessarily brief, so that they may be grasped by the simple-minded, and by children. But, short and fragmentary as are these

records, they are meant to be the foundation stones of an eternal and infinite structure of truth. And, in the light of the Spirit of truth, each fragment becomes a vast whole, each shadow is traced up to some mighty reality. The stable and the manger—how little is said of them; they seem very ordinary, very ignoble, but we know now that they formed for a time the home of the INCARNATE GOD. The wilderness—a few words tell all we read of it; but we know now it was the battle field of the race of man with all the visible and unseen powers of darkness. So with the Ascension. A few brief sentences tell all we know of the last day that Christ lived on this earth, of those who saw Him, what He said, how He miraculously passed from the view of His disciples, as He stretched forth His hands to bless them. But we know now that this Ascension was more, far more, than a mere surprise for the entranced Galileans. We who were present last Thursday night were taught some of the great moral truths radiating from this marvelous fact of Christ's triumphal departure to the Father. But, apart from the greatness and depth of its moral significance, you will learn the sublime import and grandeur of the Ascension,

if you can, in thought and love, follow your LORD to His Heavenly Throne. You lose sight of earth—the cloud-veil which hides Him from the view of the disciples is the chariot which bears that human frame of Jesus to some definite abode. “He maketh the clouds His chariot,” and He passes onward up to Heaven. You speak of Heaven very often as the home of the blessed, as the abode of God; but you really know very little about it, and, believe me, your only guarantee that you talk about a definite place and not about a state of being, is that Heaven is the home of the risen body of your LORD. The Ascension proves to you, to-day, what it showed to the peasants who gazed stedfastly at the receding form of JESUS, that Heaven is no fiction, no pretty dream-land of a fertile imagination,—no

“Fairy-castle, doomed to perish
When the fancy has decay’d.”

It is, it ever will be, a definite, substantial reality. To prepare for us this everlasting home, JESUS ascends. He leaves the silent, awe-stricken wonder of men for the acclamations of angels. Passing through the orders and ranks

of those countless multitudes which people worlds we know not where, everywhere recognised as the "Good Shepherd," who, leaving the celestial worlds which needed no redemption, came to give His life to save this one lost, fallen world, and was bringing back the very signatures of its salvation written in the death wounds of His hands and pierced side, He is greeted by the chorus of joy, taken up by the answering choirs of a million spheres—"Blessing, and glory, "and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, "and power, and might be unto our God for ever "and ever." As He still ascends, every knee is bowed to the Only Begotten SON OF GOD. Once a little lower than the angels, He is now King of angels and of archangels. And there, before the Throne of God, He stays to receive the welcome of that voice which twice in His earthly life was heard to say, "This is My beloved Son, in whom "I am well pleased." Then, on the eternal throne, bathed in the light which no other human being has ever approached unto, He takes His seat in power and great glory.

And is He unmindful, these ten days, of the few faithful followers He loved on earth? Not so. "Having loved His own, which were in the

“world, He loved them unto the end.” Why then should so long a time elapse, a time which, you say, looks like a blank, whilst both He and they await the promise of the Father?

It was necessary, without doubt, brethren, both for Him and for His Infant Church.

We may but reverently surmise what that period of ten days was to our ascended LORD. Was it, think you, that He journeyed on beyond the cloud-veil throughout these days? That He paused in His glorious track to show to all God’s rational creation, stage by stage, up to the highest heaven, what He had done for man? Or was it that He spent these days in rehearsing from His throne before the assembled angels the story of His life on earth, giving to those whose ministry was amongst men, charge concerning the souls He had redeemed? Or was it, think you, that the everlasting Father gathers before the human Christ the whole company of heaven, that the man Christ JESUS may receive the homage of things in heaven as hereafter of things in earth, and things under the earth; that even then every tongue of beings celestial should confess that JESUS CHRIST is LORD, to the glory of GOD the Father? Or is it that in the height

of worlds to which even He, in His human nature, was a stranger, He is shown the glorious resting place of the children of God, the everlasting home of the redeemed? Or is it that He completes, in these days of silence, the work of His redemption by pleading as our great High Priest His own sacrifice, and claiming the promise of the Holy Ghost? Or, once more, is it that by mysterious union of the persons of the blessed Trinity, the Holy Ghost is there taking, receiving, of the things of Christ, that He may show them unto us?

We cannot tell. Nor need we know, save that we may so conceive of Thee, O JESUS, exalted as Thou art, that we may worthily magnify Thy Holy Name!

We may better think how on the earth the first disciples "waited for the promise of the "Father."

With them, as with their ascended Master, waiting did not imply inactivity. To await, is to expect, to hope for some object desired, or promised, or foretold. And hope, if it be really strong, is never inactive. It is the spring, setting in motion thought and imagination. It is likewise the impelling power which makes

men act and work towards the desired object. And, lastly, hope is like the electric spark in its rapid flash along the paths of imagination; and there it finds out, it summons to the inmost shrine of the soul the distant treasure, that it may nurse this in secret. So was it with the apostles. They were told to "wait for the promise of the Father." But do not think, my brethren, that this waiting was the blank many have pictured to themselves. It was a time of patient expectation and hope. And the hope of the apostles—strong, because of the faith they had in their departed LORD, was not passive and apathetic. It made them think. They considered and realised their position. They were the body of Christ—the temple which He had raised up to be universal, Catholic, after His three days' death. But their number was incomplete. One member chosen by Christ had indeed proved himself a devil, and had gone to his own place. They needed another apostle. It was no hasty thought which settled the conditions of the candidature. The new apostle must have seen JESUS CHRIST. He must have been a *witness*—even from the Baptist's early ministry;—and especially must he have seen JESUS after the

resurrection. They look forward to the mission with which Christ has entrusted them. They would have to face the prejudices, the questionings, the criticisms of all nations. They need, therefore, in the new apostle, every qualification of testimony. Testimony, humanly speaking, will be their great power in the world. Again, in the newly-appointed Apostle, they need one in every sense their co-ordinate. He must be an equal—not an inferior—for already they realise their separate order; their position in the vast future as the foundation of the Christian Church. They must prepare to receive the Spirit of truth, “the promise of the Father,” by such an election. They choose two as fulfilling the necessary conditions; and one is then set apart by lot—they leaving the ultimate choice to divine ordering. Here were thought and action making ready for the fulfilment of their hope. But again, often and often, during these days of waiting would their expectation lead them to contemplate the promised gift. They knew the Hebrew Scriptures. It was probably no impromptu utterance that S. Peter gave as to the prophecy of Joel on the Day of Pentecost. But, then, how should the promise of the Father affect them? How should it

fit them for their world-wide mission? How should it reveal more of their absent LORD to them; and, above all, how should it make up to them, and to the whole Church, His personal loss? And so, reasoning, imagining, waiting, they also prayed. They worshipped JESUS. That was a clear duty now; they understood now what He was. They also prayed in the Temple. With hearts beating high at the thought of all JESUS had entrusted to them; with feelings of love and devotion quickened ever by communion with each other; they went there to pray—to plead—to supplicate for the promised gift. Already in the hidden hope and love of every apostle, the Holy Spirit had a throne: and He could afterwards, there, to each of them, reveal things which before had been secret from the foundation of the world; He could show them things to come; He could inspire courage, and truth, and love. He could be, in great measure, through the very discipline of this waiting for the promise of the Father, the true Comforter in every circumstance of their apostolic life.

“Wait for the promise of the Father.” That promise is likewise ours. We have, in part, received it, brethren. We are already sealed by

the Holy Spirit of God unto the day of redemption. But so long as we live in this world, it is possible, nay, it is our great privilege, to increase in that Holy Spirit more and more. We may grieve the Holy Spirit by sin, so that He leaves us. But if not, then, brethren, our duty is likewise to wait daily for the promise of the Father. And so our life here is two-fold. The life of aspiration and the life of patience.

So far as we have received this great gift—the Spirit of God—our life is one of *aspiration*. We sit already in heavenly places with CHRIST JESUS ascended. We have our conversation there, where He is gone before. “In heart and “mind we thither ascend.” And we yearn for that pure, spotless life beyond the grave, where we shall be ever with Christ. Every sigh for that higher life—every desire for further purity—every prayer we utter for the things which are above, is an aspiration which brings us nearer our LORD.

But, on the other hand, in so far as we are yet of the earth, earthy ; fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, we can but lead the life of patience. We must wait for God, for the promise of the Father. You see in yourself

weaknesses, failures, transgressions ; you long to put them from you—to overcome. “Wait.” Do not think to overcome your faults by the false bustle of much of our modern religious life, where there is no tranquillity—nothing of what the French divines have well called “Recollec-
“tion of soul.” Again, you do not enjoy prayer. It is a mere task, apparently empty and profitless. Again, I say, “Wait for the promise of the
“Father.” *Wait*—not inactively, but hopefully, —not making vain efforts to realise—but by calm and tranquil preparation of soul, looking upward, until there shall stir within you the voice pleading, and drawing up to the Intercessor your fervent desires. Again, you cannot understand some doctrine, some teaching of the Church, some passage of Holy Writ. Again, I say, “Wait.” Do not hastily rush off to join the nearest body of religionists who may think pretty much as you do at present ; but if you are really seeking God’s truth, “wait” in prayer, in meditation, for “the promise of the Father;” and you shall have an unction from the Holy One, so that you shall know all things which are now hidden from you. And once more. Your life—the very providence which regulates

your present circumstances—is a puzzle to you. You are disposed to murmur, and to let your will rebel. All is not as you thought and expected, perhaps years ago, it would be. Again, I say, “Wait.” Do not chafe and fret. Behind all that you see is a vast future which you do not see. “All things,” be sure, “work together for good to them that love God.” “Wait for the promise of the Father;” and in the light and love of the Holy Ghost, be assured, that “what thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter.”

SERMON III.

THE MERCHANT-MAN SEEKING
GOODLY PEARLS.

*Preached at the Re-union of former Students of the Derby
Training College, on the Wednesday in Whitsun Week, 1879.*

S. MAT. XIII. 45, 46.

“Again the kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls. Who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

It was my desire to-day that you, my dear friends, should be addressed by other lips than mine. But since it has fallen to my lot, as your Chaplain, to preach to you, I hope the selection of one of our Blessed LORD's parables as a text may serve to recall some of the most sacred hours of your student life, when your thought and feeling were from time to time won by the lessons of the Holy Gospels.

If you carry your thought back again to such *hours*, you will remember how the parables of

the LORD JESUS are like mines of inexhaustible treasure. Even in those two or three instances where the Divine Teacher is Himself the Interpreter of His Parables, the one exposition He gives does not, and is not meant to exclude others. The meaning He gives is doubtless in every case, the primary one; the one most needed for the Church as a whole. But, side by side with this, there are many subsidiary teachings which the heart of man in its needs will quickly discover. Thus, though in the Parable of the Sower, we have one primary interpretation given by Christ Himself, there are a thousand other meanings for society, for the home, for the individual, for the secret heart. That parable is not merely the representation of the Word of God preached and received by different types of human character; it is the portraying of false and true friendships; it is the delineation of the secret history of your soul and mine; it is the exquisite picture of the heart in its seeking for responsive sympathy. Such variety of interpretation, then, may we seek this morning to give to the parable before us. The very opening words bid us apply the story as fully, as widely, as deeply, as we will.

“The kingdom of heaven”—is the antitype of the similitude. And “the kingdom of heaven”—you know it is the Church of the living God over which JESUS reigns as Head. But if the Church—then all things which that Church contains and receives and is possessed of—the great Pentecostal gift of the Holy Ghost; the Gospel of the Blessed God; the ministry; the sacraments; the right of free access in prayer to the Father’s face; all things in heaven and in earth that are true, honest, just, fair, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy; all future hope: all these things are “of the kingdom of heaven;” for that kingdom is Christ’s; and Christ is God’s. The kingdom of heaven is certainly in our midst. It is yours, my dear friends, not only in those more solemn hours of worship in the Church, not only in the sanctuary of your private chamber, where alone you commune with God. It is in your work—in the schools over which you preside—in the Training College where your mind and heart are preparing the implements of knowledge and mental power, and those habits and dispositions which shall communicate your very selves in influence to other souls. If you have not yet felt this, you

who have gone forth from us to the responsible, practical exercise of your gifts ; you who have more recently left your early homes for the shelter of our diocesan home for your training ;— if for you, the life and work of school teachers are but the perpetual toil and struggle of discipline against children's rebellion ; of patience against children's restlessness ; of instruction wielded against children's ignorance and dulness ;—if for you, life is but the anxious mental strain to meet the ever-growing requirements of examination ; but the sense that you are swayed by regulations and rules issued by a department of the State ;— or, if on the other hand, your life and work are but the means of living, of earning bread and of getting gain ; oh, let me ask you to-day to see all in a higher light. For the kingdom of heaven is within you, in your very hearts ; and neither the anxiety and irritation and depression of work, nor the seeking for livelihood must crush and despoil the "pearl of great price."

I. The primary meaning of our Parable is, as you would at once remember, that the merchantman is the seeker after truth and holiness. After long search, which has been from time to time

rewarded with gleams and revelations—goodly pearls of precious value—the seeker comes upon the revelation of Jesus Christ. This is the most precious of all that he has seen ; Jesus Christ is the way ; His precepts, His example, His doctrine, His redemption and mediation are the very path through the mazes of life. And Jesus Christ is the truth, both in creation and in mediation between God and man ; that in which all other truths, whether of nature or revelation, centre, and from which they radiate. And Jesus Christ is the life—the vivifier of man’s moral and spiritual being now, and the quickening power for the death-wrapt body at the Resurrection. And so, the seeker after truth and holiness can give up the faint gleams of light and goodness found in human systems, in natural instincts, in theories of morals ; for he finds them embraced, and outreached in the revelation of Christ.

How has this primary application of the parable received illustration in the history of man’s struggles for spiritual light ? The old moralists, Plato, Socrates, Seneca, all strove to grope through the darkness of human error and ignorance to the light of purity and knowledge of the highest ; and we read their thoughts to-day and

see how they found, indeed, goodly pearls. But the world was not satisfied. The world awaited the Incarnation of perfection in the person of JESUS; the world needed redemption from its pollution. And it was then—after Bethlehem, and Calvary—that the world went and exchanged the yearnings of past philosophy for the great pearl of the kingdom of heaven, the revelation of God's mercy and love in the Gospel. And so, while the old moral teachers had their handful of adherents, the little rill of a personal influence; JESUS CHRIST the Righteous swayed and still sways the vast multitude of the human race wherever He has been "lifted up."

Beautifully, too, is this parable illustrated from the stories of individual lives. A Justin can sacrifice all previous searchings and acquisitions of knowledge when he hears on the sea-shore of Palestine the story of JESUS CHRIST. An Augustine can break the bonds of passion, and throw aside earthly hopes, when he hears the call of Christ to crucify the flesh, the life. Apostles can give up all, and follow Him, that they may have the eternal crown. Martyrs can bear to suffer, to agonize, to die, as they cling with steadfast love to the pearl of great price. And

you and I, beloved, have we never felt the unspeakable joy of the possession of that one Pearl of life—hidden away from sight, but coming in our solitary moments to reflect to us its hues of superhuman loveliness? Our other life-pearls,—companionships, loved pursuits, cherished imaginings,—have we not sometimes set them aside that we might go into the cleft of the rock, and see there something of the glory of God's countenance? You and I are, indeed, merchantmen, seeking goodly pearls. We seek knowledge. You, students, in your lecture room, in your class, in private; you, teachers, in your preparation work in your quiet rooms; we, clergy, in our studies, learning that we may teach;—we find, all of us, goodly pearls. But, blessed be those of us, who in self-sacrifice, in lowliness, and in prayer find the knowledge and love of GOD!

II. But I must hasten to give you another interpretation of the parable. The kingdom of heaven is the SON of GOD looking through the far ages for the most precious things in the infinite creation of GOD. He heard the ceaseless songs of highest heavenly beings and the responsive strains of angels. All were His own. He

loved them—they were precious as pearls of beauty. He looked at the worlds rolling in everlasting order round the Heavenly Throne. All were His. His voice had once sounded—the voice of the Eternal Word—through the infinite tracks of His universe, that everything was very good. He felt the immensity, the pricelessness of that love which had eternally communicated to Him the very essence of His Father's Being. He knew the immeasurable dignity of His Deity. And yet there was one goodly pearl He craved far more than all. It was man's redemption—to set man free from the law of sin and death. And so, He sold all that He had to buy that one pearl. He relinquished the glories of His Deity, He gave up the sovereignty of angels, the sway of myriad worlds, to be born as man, to die as a slave, to purchase the one pearl of salvation for man!

When He gives us this parable, He speaks to all of us of His own wondrous love. But He speaks to clergy and school-teachers even more forcibly than to others. As He sought, with the eagerness of a man in the competition of the race of life, to win man's soul, so we must be eager as merchant-men likewise.

Of our responsibilities in this quest, as clergy, we cannot speak to-day. Only, when these Ember Days come round, pray for us, Christian men and women. Ye quicken us by your prayer. Ye check our disposition to fail as we feel your intercession.

But to you, as teachers, we must speak in Christ's name. Ye are as merchant-men, Christian teachers. You have been called by the Church, by the State, to the charge of human souls. Some desire—I trust, an enthusiastic desire—on your own part, led to this high calling. I earnestly hope it was no “chapter of accidents”—if we may use such a term—the passing successfully through the grades of elementary school-life, and the selection of you by others—the compliance with the regulations of a civil code—that has brought you before me to-day. Much more do I hope it was not the desire of the large stipends now offered to elementary school teachers. To look at such an office as yours from a mercenary point of view is at once to degrade you in holding it—you are not worthy of it. To hear of your constantly changing your schools for the desire of more stipend only, is to me great sadness. If you

do your duty in the spirit in which you are called to it, I feel sure you will never want. Therefore, again, I hope your aim in your work is a pure one. How many pearls lie before you in that work! To watch the growth, the development, even of the physical frame and power of a child, is great happiness. To trace the progress from the infant all conscious of its weakness and need of protection, to the dawn and development of conscious, independent strength, is to see the opening of some choice bud in the beautiful spring-time. To watch the quick action and strong strength of children is to mark the germs of that manhood or womanhood, which will be power of health and work and life in the human family. Here is something to win your motherly care in the schools under your charge!

And there is the treasure of the opening and developing intelligence. As children rise year by year in your schools, they become more and more your companions and friends, sharing your intellectual life. To all but those either blinded by prejudice or deformed and stunted by mental incapacity, the reception and communication of knowledge is an intense pleasure. The prejudiced are, of course, unable to receive truth;

the dull and weak can neither receive nor impart it. But even in their lowest types the reception and imparting of knowledge are manifested as bringing happiness to mankind. How eagerly do the ears of neighbours listen to the recital of news about one of their fellows! How we all like to have some information to impart in conversation which others are not aware of! And as in the lowest types of the communication of knowledge, so in the higher. A good teacher never finds attention flag or droop; the eager young minds drink with never-ceasing thirst. These joys are pearls in your work.

And there are the pearls of successful results. We dare not exclude them from reckoning in these days of fierce competition. But though we, in our training college, and you, in your schools, are not strangers to the merits of successful intellectual work, I should be sorry to put "results of examination" as the first among your goodly pearls. There is an unwholesome side to this ceaseless competition. There is that hateful comparison of one with another, fostering pride; there is that striving simply for results, which too often neglects, while it seems to secure, true culture even of the intellect.

But the pearl of great price—where is that in your work? Perhaps you would answer, “the religious lesson.” And with regard to the subjects you have to teach, your answer would be undoubtedly right. But your work is all religious work. Yes, fellow-workers, I care not where your lot is cast—in Church schools, or under School Boards—the same responsibility lies upon you. You have the charge of children’s souls. And to a high-minded teacher, no lesson occurs which does not present opportunities for religious training. To check dishonesty, to win to perseverance, to stimulate to industry, to secure thorough conscientiousness—the world calls these moral lessons; we call them religious training,—for morality is a vast part of religion. True, that where this is possible there must be clear and true teaching of Christian doctrine; and where this is rendered impossible, there yet lie before you the Holy Gospels, full of the representation of the Person and Work of JESUS CHRIST. But your religious thought must be not over such lessons only, but over all your work, if you would find “the pearl of great price.”

And you will find it in the quiet growth of

reverence and love for God, deep buried in the heart of one and another in whom it becomes the main-spring of action and manner. I need not tell you how to seek it. Your own hearts, if pure and true to God, will quickly beat in sympathy with the religious impressions, the Christ-like virtues, of other souls.

But to have found one such young soul, my dear friends ; to be able to say in your silent hour of prayer, that you thank your Heavenly Father that He has revealed Himself unto one babe ; is to have gained, as a teacher, the pearl of great price !

I have said enough. Let us now go to the sacred Feast with one last thought fastened on our very lives by this parable. The kingdom of heaven lies in three things :—aspiration for the highest ; unwearied pursuit of the highest ; self-sacrifice for the highest. See that this is written over your own heart—over your intellect—over your life—over your school—over your training college. And believe and realise that as you, with that eagerness which is so exemplary to us in the busy life of the world, aspire after the highest, seek diligently for the noblest and best in study and in result of work, and sacrifice your

own pride, and will, and means, and power, that you may win the perfect life for yourselves and others ; you will find, my dear sisters, for time and for eternity, the very kingdom of heaven !

SERMON IV.

DEPRESSION.

Preached on Mid-Lent Sunday, 1880.

JOB xxxii. 28, 29.

“The Light shall shine upon thy ways. When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up.”

THIS is called Mid-Lent Sunday because it is now that the Church has passed through the first half of her most solemn fast. We call it also “Refreshment Sunday,” because it was the custom in former days to make a special feast on this day. All Sundays in Lent, as all other Sundays, are Feast Days; but from the stringency of the fast of Lent, “Refreshment Sunday” became a feast of importance. In some parts of England it is still the custom to make special festive preparations for this day. The Gospel for the day speaks of the refreshment of the multitudes in the wilderness by the miracu-

lous increase of food. Those who had gone out far from home to listen in the silent desert to the Word of Life ; and who had there sustained a keen and weakening fast, were, in their faintness, the objects of Christ's compassion ; and by Divine power He fed them.

The Collect for to-day points out that there is other kind of refreshment than that for the body. There is the "comfort of God's grace," which alone can relieve the spirit of man. And it is with the hope of being able to provide such refreshment for some or other amongst us that the words of our text have been chosen this morning. They are, you will remember, part of an address from Eliphaz, the Temanite, to Job, based, as all the addresses from Job's friends were, on the assumption that it was because of some secret sin, as yet unrepented of, that Job was troubled. And the exhortation of Eliphaz to Job, is that he should return to the Almighty, and then peace and gladness, if not prosperity, would await him. Thus the beautiful promise—"The light shall shine upon thy ways. When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up," is made contingent on this return to God. You know, brethren, the story of Job's life—that

these friends suspected him falsely ; and that in all that befell him his heart did rest upon God. We may therefore take as absolute these words of Eliphaz, and apply them as refreshment to the heart that needs. And the one great need which they seem especially designed to meet is that of a depressed spirit.

There are few who do not know what depression is ; that have not suffered from it. In early years, indeed, when the spirit is buoyant, the health strong, the imagination of personal power still unfettered, there is but little experience of that inexpressible sadness of heart which darkens all our view of life. Then few sighs escape our lips, and few pangs pain our heart. When we are young, we gird ourselves, and walk whither we will ; but as the burden of life increases, as we become older in experience and care, another girds us, and carries us whither we would not. And that other ? Surely, none but He Who Himself bare the yoke of our sorrows, and carried the cross of our shame and suffering. It is thus by shewing us through the sense of depression the weakness of our heart, that He teaches us to lean upon Him for sympathy. For *there is* in the heart of every man a fount of

sadness. One here and there may be naturally hilarious, and see all around in golden glow ; and others may be of such calm and equable temperament that the stream of their life glides onward with unruffled surface. But even in such lives there needs but the touch of a mighty grief, a sudden disappointment, a harrowing wrong ; or perhaps the pressure of a long overstrain of sympathy, or of lingering sickness, to open the secret spring, and reveal to the soul its own weakness of depression.

Aye, again we say, there is a deep melancholy in the heart of every man, woven into the very texture of his life ; a melancholy which, like the gently-wafted breath of some fragrant flower, is ever ready to spread itself secretly over all his being. And in spirits of the finest tone there is the most of this ; for this depression is the unsatisfied yearning of the soul ; and the greatness of the soul cannot be satisfied on earth—it learns its true consolation in God. And, brethren, we dwell always on the brink of these dark and mighty waters of depression ; so that at any time, by any unforeseen occurrence, the foundations of their great deep may be broken up, and the soul be flooded with sadness.

We may at once perceive, then, brethren, that there is no sin or wrong in being depressed. Such a state results from the great mystery of our being—the union of the mortal with the immortal—of the weak and perishable body with the eager and aspiring soul. Is it wonderful that the mind—itself finite and weighted down by the very sense of its limited power ; that the heart, knowing its weakness of affection, and yet desiring the infinite love—should at times feel the burden of existence, and crave for more light, for more rest, for true joy ?

O heart, how fares it with thee now,
That thou should'st fail from thy desire,
Who scarcely dardest to enquire,
“ What is it makes me beat so low ? ”

Behold, we know not anything ;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream ; but what am I ?
An infant, crying in the night :
An infant crying for the light :
And with no language but a cry.

This consideration, that there is no wrong in depression, will help us to look upon it with great tenderness in those round about us. We, as strangers, cannot intermeddle with this undefined grief of another's soul. We oftentimes, even with bright words from our own stronger faith, cannot reach it. The cheerfulness of our own manner may divert it; just as the arousing tones of some joyous music will remove for a little that subtler music lingering on in the heart and mind as the echo of a strain which once has touched us, and which becomes the secret expression of our hidden feeling. But as this subtler music returns when the ear has ceased to communicate other influences—returns with all its silent flow of echoed harmonies—so your cheerfulness can but divert for a time the depression of another, and the heart will again yearn in its solitude. And least of all should we meet the depression of others with rude rebuke, or contemptuous sneer. The spirit that is thus low is under the chastening of a Father's Hand. It is seeking God in the desert. And no rebuke of a preaching Eliphaz, or sneer from the lips of a seared worldling, can make that wilderness and solitary

place glad, or cause that desert to rejoice. No, when those around us are low in heart, it is by the gentle sympathy of quiet kindness—not in word, but in deed—that we should be able to say, “The light shall shine upon thy ways. Though thou art cast down, there is lifting “up.”

But what of our own depression? Has religion no teaching, no help, no refreshment of comfort for us? Yes, brethren. First of all, it tells us not to nurse it. The mind becomes morbid by clinging to this secret feeling of sorrow. It becomes like an instrument out of tune. Beautiful indeed the sweet minor passages of a Beethoven or a Mendelssohn. But listen to nothing else, and you will tire and sicken even of these creations of supreme genius. Or, again, play upon some instrument attuned only for minor music, and you will find it terribly inconsistent with itself. So with your heart. Remember it was created, not for depression, but for joy. Yes, GOD made us in His own image. And no thought of sorrow, no inequality of feeling, disturbs the eternal, self-possessed joy of GOD. Depression must not be encouraged. When it *comes*, it comes as one sad proof that our being

is out of joint, out of harmony, because of sin. As we strive to overcome sin, each in his own heart and life, so should we strive to feel the joy which is one of the fruits of holiness.

And, next, Religion says to us about our depression, "Do not let others see it, if you can help it." There are always in every heart feelings and memories which are best buried in the tomb with Christ. And depression is one of these things. It is selfish to display it. For, to drag down others to the depths of our melancholy is to wound and hurt their spirit. And to talk about our feelings of sadness that we may provoke expressions of sympathy, is, if not sinful, at least so selfish that we deprive our brother of his great birthright of joy, and turn our discipline of depression into a luxury. I do not mean that there are not times when the soul in its fulness will not express its over burden from very necessity. This is when all seems too hard for us. But, as a rule, it is best for us in secret to pour out our grief at the Cross, and to hear there the voice, "The light shall shine upon Thy ways. When men are cast down, I, JESUS, say, "There is lifting up."

Once more. Religion teaches that duty

suffers through our depression. God has sent us into the world to do for Him, each according to our several ability. Every true work is full of difficulty. The curse of sin still clouds every region of our toil—"Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee." And so there is need of courage and of cheerfulness to overcome. It is the lack of courage which makes the hand hang down in sloth, which allows any ambition for good, any generous desire for better things, to be stifled amidst the weeds of the soul's apathy. It was depression which made the slothful servant hide his talent in the earth. He did nothing—not because he was unwilling to work, but because he took a dark and gloomy view both of himself and of his Lord's justice.

Let us remember, in those hours of wearying labour, when disappointment and anxiety bear down the spirit, and when elasticity and cheerfulness forsake us, and life seems overburdened, that He who gave man work to do as a trust, and Who has made it to be, to all true-hearted ones, a blessing and a strength, is assuredly at hand with succour, and with the gladdening promise, "The light shall shine upon thy ways. Be of *good cheer*—There is lifting up."

And, lastly, the revelation of God teaches every one of us the nearness of God to us in the hours of the soul's darkness. Do not repine, nor lose hope, O Christian heart! Thou art in the desert, and great are the difficulties which beset thy path. But know thou, that as He leads His chosen in the wilderness, He shows His protecting Presence and His Fatherly guidance not only in the majestic column of glowing light which dispels the night's gloom; but also in the pillar of cloud whose depth of darkness no eye can penetrate. As He was with Jacob in the night at Bethel, so it may be that in thy depression He is nearest thee.







