

I.

Everything in the Scriptures is Perfect.

OCTOBER 14, 1855.

MY dear friends, dearly beloved brothers and sisters, with whom I am happy and thankful to partake of the body and blood of our Saviour—of that body which is meat indeed, and that blood which is drink indeed, to all those who receive them in faith by the Holy Spirit—there is in the Scriptures a feature which would alone suffice to make them known as the Word of God: all is perfect. Everything in the Scriptures is absolute and perfect. They never call us to a certain degree only of holiness, by a certain measure only of faith; for all measure is contrary to the spirit of the Bible, because it is unknown to God. The perfect ideal of the Scriptures is not like that of the poets, who unduly magnify the things of our earth by elevating them to the third heaven. The Bible, on the contrary, considers visible things as types only of the invisible, which alone are eternal. And so it is that God considers all things. This remark struck my attention this morning, when reflecting before the Lord on what I could say to you on the subject of the communion and the cross of Jesus Christ, by which cross alone we obtain the remission of our sins.

The Scriptures everywhere present to our view sin in its true deformity. Not one of us can have a just idea of the guilt and enormity of sin in the sight of God. We have been so accustomed to live in the polluted atmosphere of this world, which drinks in iniquity as water and eats it as bread, that we cannot discern the sin which everywhere so completely surrounds us. My experience is briefly this. We find in the Bible these words, "We were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." For a long time I could not admit this declaration, it appeared to me so evidently an exaggeration; and even after God had by His grace turned my heart towards Him in the day He had marked from all eternity, it was long before I could completely accept it. And even now, I cannot comprehend it to the full, though convinced that it is perfectly true; and if I do not realise it in my experience, the fault is entirely mine. It was this that made me comprehend the necessity of a witness existing before us, without us, and above us. I accept this declaration as coming from God, because I find it in His Word, and I pray that He may reveal to me the full meaning of it by His Holy Spirit. I have, by the grace of God, attained (I do not say in a short space of time—these things do not advance so rapidly—but in an interval of several years) to a clearer view of this doctrine, and to a deeper feeling of its truth in my own heart; and I am sure that when I shall have laid down this mortal tabernacle, I shall acknowledge it to be the most faithful resemblance that has ever been traced of my heart—I mean of my natural, un-regenerated heart. Let us pray that God would gradually more and more reveal to us our state of sin, though only by degrees; for He is well aware that if our

knowledge of our own condition were to increase more rapidly than our knowledge of His mercy, we should fall into despair.

But pardon is also represented as complete and perfect in the Scriptures. If only a part of our sins were forgiven, if, out of a thousand, or a million of our sins (if they could be numbered), only one remained unforgiven, the pardon would be useless. But the pardon is complete. The passage quoted just now (2 Cor. v. 21) is one of my favourite texts. Jesus Christ not only atoned for some sins, but for sin. He was not treated as the sinner, He was made sin; and in this mystery of mysteries, all the wrath of God was poured out upon His innocent and holy head. And so we are not only made righteous in Him, but we are made the righteousness of God in Him; so that when God looks upon us in Jesus Christ, He beholds us as one with His well-beloved Son, upon whom He ever looks with complacency and love. We, who believe, have been given by God to Christ as the price of His sacrifice. His promise is as sure to us as to Jesus Christ himself, and all His perfections are so closely linked together, that this gift of His infinite mercy becomes the right of our perfect righteousness in Jesus Christ. The Scriptures, in making known to us what sin is in the sight of God, show at the same time how He has done away with it. "He has cast all our sins behind his back," as if He feared to see them again. "He has cast them into the depths of the sea; blotted out as a cloud our transgressions, and as a thick cloud our sins." We see by this what it is for God to forget sin. He is represented as endeavouring to forget; or rather it is not forgetfulness, but complete oblivion.

Again, the Scriptures are absolute in what they say of sanctification. We can have no adequate idea of what they require of us, nor of the degree of holiness to which we can and ought to attain. What fullness is there in these words, "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly, and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!" And to prove that this was not a simple wish expressed by the apostle, he immediately adds, "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." It is equally impossible for Him to refuse us this grace, as it is for Him to break His word. And how can we attain to this holiness? How did the holy men whom the Bible holds out as examples attain to their greatness? It was not by their science or by their natural gifts, but by their faith. See what St James says. To show us the power of the prayer of faith, he takes the most wonderful man perhaps of the Bible, and the most wonderful of his miracles; he speaks of the boldness of this prayer of Elias as quite natural, and holds it up as an example to the least and the humblest, to show us what the persevering prayer of the righteous man may obtain.

If every one of us could, from this day, feel in his own heart the enormity of sin, the fullness of its pardon, and the power of the holiness to which we ought to attain; what a change there would be in our life, and what a salutary influence this would have on the Church itself

Prayer.

O God! Thou who knowest all the misery and sufferings that sin has brought into our poor world, and on our poor humanity; Thou who seest all who suffer at this moment, and of whom we could not bear even the sight; we commend to Thy care all the afflicted, that Thou mayest shed upon them the treasures of Thy grace and Thy consolations. We cannot name them all, but Thou wilt name them to Thyself. We commend to Thy care the victims of the war, and all the families plunged in grief by it, and all those whom it causes to live in continual terror. We commend to Thy mercy all those who are oppressed for righteousness' sake. We commend to Thy care all those living in slavery: consider those thousands and millions of slaves oppressed by men who profess Thy name,—by servants of Christ who are not servants. We commend to Thy care the poor, ah, the poor! the sick, and especially the sick poor. We commend to Thy care those that know Thee, praying that Thou wouldst support them, and shed upon them Thy peace and Thy consolation. And we commend to Thy grace those who know Thee not, praying Thee to reveal Thyself to them, for they have no alternative but despair if they know Thee not. I suffer a little, and confess Christ and His peace. I thank Thee for the joy that Thou hast poured into my soul. Thou wilt call us perhaps to separate for a time, but what is that? We know that by Thy grace we shall soon be reunited around Thee.