

## III.

## Frequent Communion.

OCTOBER 28, 1855.

MY dear friends, I am anxious you should know that I find during my illness much comfort from the frequent reception of the communion, and I hope much profit also. It is a great evil that the communion is celebrated so seldom in our Church, and efforts are now being made in many places to remedy it. When our Reformers established the present order of things, they carefully explained that they intended it for a temporary arrangement only, to correct much disorder that had crept into the primitive Church. What they established for a time only has remained for ages in most of our Churches. But we are drawing to the period when more frequent communion will be restored. Calvin says somewhere that the communion ought to be celebrated at least every Sunday. Observe these words, "at least;" if every Sunday is the least, what, then, is the most? The most would be to receive it as the primitive Christians did, according to Calvin (and as appears clearly from the Acts), every day, from house to house, after the family meal. You must all have felt that these rare communions give to the ordinance itself something mysterious and extraordinary, from the preparation that must precede it, and from the emotions that accompany it. It is probably this which has given rise to most of the controversy on the subject. Frequent communion, on the contrary, makes us comprehend much more easily the true character of the sacrament; and it is impossible that daily communion should not make it still more easy. It would teach us to associate the idea of the communion with the most simple acts of the Christian life, as our meals are the most simple parts of our ordinary life. Be that as it may, it is by seeing in the communion the most simple expression of our faith that we shall derive the greatest advantage from it, and that it will really feed our souls with the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

There is in our "Confession of Faith" a passage upon the subject so beautiful that I will read it to you. It is the exact expression of my own sentiments:—"We confess that there is in the Lord's supper a testimony of our union with Jesus Christ, and the more so that He not only died and rose again for us, but that He really feeds and nourishes us with His body and blood, so that we are one with Him, and that His life is in us. Now, though He is in heaven till He shall come to judge the world, yet we believe that by the secret and incomprehensible virtue of His Spirit, He feeds and vivifies us by the substance of His own body and blood. We believe that this is done spiritually, not to substitute for truth either thought or imagination; but inasmuch as this mystery surpasses in height the measure of our senses, and the whole order of nature. . . . We believe that in the Lord's supper, as well as in baptism, God does really give us what is prefigured in it. And therefore we add to the signs the true possession and enjoyment of what is represented by them. And thus all those who bring to the Lord's holy table pure faith, as an empty vessel, really receive what the

signs testify: that the body and blood of Jesus Christ are not less useful as meat and drink to the soul, than bread and wine are to the body. The bread and wine being given to us in the Lord's supper are really our spiritual food, and the more so that they show us plainly that the body of Jesus Christ is our meat, and His blood our drink."

I will only add to this admirable citation, that the Lutheran pastor, Verny, having one day read it to some Lutheran friends who were reasoning with him on the communion, they replied, "That is the exact expression of our faith," to which Mr Verny answered that the citation was taken from the "Confession of Faith" of the Reformed Church; which proves that by keeping close to the Scriptures, as is here done, we rise by faith and charity above the field of controversy.

My friends, we bear testimony, by the communion we have just celebrated, that the Saviour's body and blood are really meat and drink, and that the highest Christian ambition of our souls is to feed night and day upon it, and to seek all our strength in a true, profound, and living communion with Jesus Christ alone. It is by prayer that we maintain that communion with Jesus Christ which will render us capable of doing what He did, and being what He was: but it is by the prayer of faith—persevering, ardent prayer, which takes no refusal, but will enjoy all that the Father has promised in his Word, and will not be silent—by prayer upon our knees, which wrestles on through blood and tears till it has obtained what it asked. Oh! what would not then be our strength and joy, unchanging and independent of all the sufferings of this miserable body, perhaps already torn and half destroyed, but which is the temple of the Holy Spirit now, and which tomorrow will be transformed into a glorious and spiritual body,—that is to say, will be filled with the Holy Spirit, like the body of Jesus Christ himself! What would not be our joy—I do not say if we had the means, for we have them—but if we so used the means that we have so as to enable us to rise ever above the trials and struggles of the flesh, and penetrate into the heart of our heavenly Father, realising the joy of our Saviour and the power of the Holy Spirit! Meditate, I entreat you, upon the Holy Spirit! Read and read over again the discourses of Jesus Christ in the last chapters of St John's Gospel; read also the seventh and following chapters of the Romans, and learn what strength and consolation we have in the Holy Spirit, who is not less than God himself. Yes, my God, Thou thyself coming to dwell in the body of Thy poor child, a miserable sinner, destroyed by suffering and sin, but saved by grace, and washed in the blood of the Lamb without blemish! Having such promises, why should we stop half way? why should we sigh over our hunger and thirst, when we are before a well-spread table, towards which we have only to stretch out the hand of faith to be fully satisfied, and to have life in abundance? Ah! if this handful of Christians now assembled here could make up their minds to be quite happy—to pray earnestly (literally, to pray in praying), like Elias; if they could resolve to overcome their natural apathy, their spiritual indolence, their incredulity,—of what should we not be capable, if we were to go throughout the world as the twelve apostles did? We might stir up all Paris; we might draw after us all our brothers and sisters, whose

hearts would be touched by seeing the gospel realised in our life! O God, this is our profound misery, that having such promises, we should do so little! Vouchsafe us Thy help; grant that this communion of the upper chamber may be, for all those who have partaken of it, or who have been present, the beginning of a new Christian life, whether we live or die; and make us so conformable to Jesus Christ that we may live as He lived, and that as He said, "He that hath seen me hath seen my Father," so we may be able to say, He that hath seen me hath seen my Master. Shed down this blessing upon these friends who are come to comfort me in my affliction—my happy affliction!