

IV.

The Pastor Suffering for the Good of the Church.

NOVEMBER 4, 1855.

WHAT a blessing has God vouchsafed to us by giving us in the communion a representation so simple, and at the same time so comprehensive, of the invisible grace of the Lord! All the groundwork of the gospel is upon this table, if we knew how to draw from it the instructions that the Scriptures supply upon the subject: for we find there these two things—first, Jesus Christ dying for us, and His death, His blood, His atoning sacrifice, the only hope of our salvation, accomplishing all for God's elect; and then we find this same Jesus, having died, entering within us, and feeding us, and communicating life to us by His body and His blood, and thus making us partakers of His nature, as He himself partakes of that of His Father.

To die to ourselves and to live to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, after Jesus Christ has died for us upon the cross, . . . this is the gospel, this is faith, this is Christian life.

I wish to add a few words, not as proceeding from any personal feeling, but under that which influenced St. Paul's declaration, "I desire that ye faint not at my tribulation." Far be it from me to compare afflictions so much greater, and endured in so direct a manner for the service of God, to those with which He has in His mercy visited me. But I wish that, by the spirit in which I accept them, they may prove an affliction endured for the gospel, and also, in my little measure, endured for you. I wish that no one should be cast down. Perhaps some of my good friends are troubled at the thought of the pain I suffer. Well, be not cast down; give me a mark of brotherly love in not being troubled, but by being awakened and excited in a salutary way. It is not that I do not suffer, or that I do not keenly feel my suffering. I am not a stoic: by the grace of God I am a Christian; and I am not ashamed to say that there are some moments, in which I pray less than I cry out with tears. I recollect that my Saviour cried with a loud voice and with tears. But though these things are painful to the flesh, they are accompanied with such great blessings, that a feeling of gratitude ought to predominate in my heart and in yours. What a favour is it for me, my dear friends, that God, choosing one of us to remind the others of the lessons which relate to life, of thoughts of death, of sin, of grace, of sanctification, should have deigned to choose me! What a privilege, that in choosing me He has spared my brethren, and what a privilege to be chosen to give you lessons of life eternal! Then think how much my sufferings will make me welcome a Christian death, whenever it may come to me. Let us all seek only to glorify God. If it should please Him to raise me up again, I pray that it may be for His glory; if He withdraw me, I shall be happy to be gathered into His bosom. I cannot know what would be best, either for me or for the Church; I give myself up entirely to Him. But what a blessing my being chosen to be thus ripened by suffering. You therefore have cause to rejoice for me; and as to your-

selves, is it not true that my afflictions have contributed to draw your thoughts to death, to eternity, and to the truths of the gospel? Is it not true that the brotherly love that unites us has stimulated you to prayer? I feel that the Lord's people bear me upon their hearts in prayer, and I am filled with joy and gratitude. And is it not good for you too? and do you not feel that what happens to me is well calculated to shed over my nearest friends, and especially over my family, a spirit of peace and meekness, and that our house is in a measure less imperfect than it has been till now—a house of prayer in which the Lord's name is more constantly invoked, especially on behalf of its members? Here again are blessings to be reaped. And consider how much comfort I find in the thought that I am afflicted for your good; for nothing can make my sufferings more like those of my Saviour. I say therefore, in the spirit of the same St. Paul whom I have already quoted, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, in my flesh, for his body's sake, which is the Church." Oh, wonder of the grace of God! power of the gospel! Oh, bitterness of sin! Oh, immutable stability of grace! Let us strive against sin, my friends; that is the only evil,—yes, the only evil. And now that I am in presence of sin, called upon to retrace before God all the sins of my life and to seek His pardon for them, I feel how terrible the struggle is, how deep-rooted sin is, and what folly it would be in me to complain of the trials God sends us, since even these trials are not sufficient to destroy this terrible pride, this frightful selfishness, and above all this detestable unbelief! May the peace of God be upon us! Let us put aside personal feelings. Do not consider in me either the father or the friend, or see them only in a certain measure; but consider above all in me the minister of Jesus Christ, and pray that till my latest breath I may be kept faithful in this ministry. Do not consider in me the man, but the work which God will accomplish in me and in you. Let us take courage. Let us pray that God may fill us with His Spirit, and make us capable of overcoming the flesh by the Spirit, till we shall all be taken from the evil to come, and made to partake, by Jesus Christ, in a spiritual body and a sanctified soul, the joy, the happiness, and the glory that the blood of Jesus Christ alone has procured for us.