

VII.

The Love of God Manifested in His Children.

NOVEMBER 25. 1855.

I MUCH feared, my dear friends, that overcome as I was by weariness and suffering, I should not have been able to address these few words to you today; but now the Lord again grants me that favour, by sending me a little relief. Think how grateful I must feel for being enabled, contrary to any human foresight, thus to exercise in some measure every Sunday that ministry which I would fain exercise till the last breath of my life; for my ministry is my life, and I feel that when I can no longer perform my ministry, I shall be withdrawn to exercise a better ministry elsewhere! Pray that God may not withdraw from me the consolation of thus receiving every Sunday the body and blood of my Saviour, to strengthen my body and my soul in Him, and also of being able to address a few words of edification and exhortation to my brethren. Last Sunday I briefly dwelt, with the friends who were present (these friends change every Sunday), upon the immense privilege of being able to glorify God, which is not only permitted, but commanded us. Today I will add that there is one way in which we are particularly obliged, and peculiarly happy to be able to glorify Him. If, among the perfections of God which we are called upon to manifest before men, there should be one perfection, the manifestation of which is the object of His peculiar satisfaction, must it not truly be in imitating it and in evidencing it in ourselves that we shall glorify Him the most? Well, what is the perfection in which God manifests His presence the most? Is it not in His goodness? Is it not written, "God is love"? God is just; yet it is not written, God is justice. God is powerful; yet it is not written, God is power. But there are two perfections to which this peculiar honour is given by the beloved disciple, leaning upon the bosom of his Saviour—holiness and love: "God is light;" "God is love;" and while he says once in his First Epistle, "God is light," he says twice in the space of a few verses, "God is love," as if to place this perfection still higher than the others. If this be the case, my dear friends, what we have to do in order to glorify God is to manifest the love that is in Him, so that in seeing us live and act, in hearing us speak, in seeing us suffer, live, and die, people may not admire us, but admire the love of God in us. And how can we manifest the love of God? Jesus Christ has shewn us. He did, above all, manifest this love; He did, above all, glorify God, and tenderly constrain all those who contemplated Him with faith to say in seeing Him, "What love there is in God, since He who said, 'He that hath seen me hath seen my Father,' is himself so full of love." And how did He show it? He showed it in all things. But He showed it more especially in suffering for His brethren—in suffering first for their temporal deliverance: "He went about doing good." But the healing of diseases was only the type and image of the true deliverance, which is spiritual. He showed this especially in suffering for their spiritual deliverance, and the highest point of the manifestation that we can

make of the love of God is in suffering for our brethren, and particularly for the salvation of their souls. We can all do this, my dear friends, in a measure. All cannot do it in a special and direct way like the apostle Paul, whose whole life was consecrated to the preaching of the gospel, and who said, "I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for his body's sake, which is the church." We must not seek a very precise interpretation of these words. There is a fund of charity, a depth of love in the words of St. Paul, which exceed the limits of human definition. His whole life was ruled by the ardent desire of imitating his Saviour, who "has left us an example that we may follow his steps;" and as his Saviour suffered to save men, Paul would willingly suffer for his brethren, not to save them—no one has declared more clearly than he that no man, no creature can do this—but to labour for their salvation: "In doing these things, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." But though we do not all endure suffering as Paul did for the service of God and for the good of men, there is no suffering to which we cannot impart this character by the spirit in which we bear it. If, "suffering according to the will of God, we commit the keeping of our souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator," and if we endeavour to turn our sufferings, those of the soul, the mind, or the body, whichever it may please God to send us, to the good of men—to their temporal good, and more especially their spiritual welfare—we shall have attained the end for which God sent them to us. And, in general, my dearly beloved, the more we love each other, the more we walk in spiritual communion with each other and with God, the more we shall be like Him. Let us then go forth into the world, every one of us being a reflection of Divine love; and may all our words, our works, our inmost thoughts and most secret prayers, breathe the love God has revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and thus force all men to say. Ah! how truly God is love!