

VIII.

Faith.

DECEMBER 2, 1855.

“BUT call to remembrance the former days, in which, after you were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, because ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”—HEB. x. 32-39.

THE faith which is the subject of the verses that have just been read, and of the admirable eleventh chapter of the Hebrews that immediately follows, that faith of which the sacrament of the Lord's supper is a representation at once simple and comprehensive,—that faith, my friends, is our only strength and our only peace; for faith is nothing less than the power of God placed at the disposal of man. In the eleventh chapter St Paul sums up in faith alone all the gifts, not only of sanctification, but of prophecy and miracles. How could Moses cross the Red Sea? He does not say, by having received supernatural power; but he says, Because he believed. How could Abraham do the great things that he did? He does not say, by a supernatural power; but he says, Because he believed. In this we should find cause of admiration, not only that the Holy Spirit explains all the greatest works of the saints by an internal and spiritual principle, but by a principle that is accessible to us all; for since nothing is mentioned, even when speaking of a Moses or an Abraham, but their faith, we learn that every one of us may be rendered capable, by this same faith, of accomplishing whatever work God places before us, as they were enabled to accomplish all that God gave them to do. These works are various, but the principle by which God accomplishes them in us is the same. It is one; it is Divine; it is all-powerful. Let us not be surprised. It seems at first very surprising that the single fact that God hears and answers us can accomplish such wonders, and truly the will of God realised in the most humble Christian is not less marvellous than the crossing of the Red Sea and all the prodigies accomplished there. But we may, on a little reflection, understand the power of faith by the nature of it. What a marvellous thing that you and I, placed in the midst of a world plunged in sin, tempted by sight, by self-will, by example, and, in short, by the evidence of our senses—that we can triumph over all these, and, against hope, against experience, against sight, irresistible sight, can believe a word, a little word that God says! You remember perhaps that saying of Luther, “*Ein Woertlein kann ihn fallen*” (a little word can make him fall); and if faith is that little word of God's penetrating into our hearts, it is not surprising

that faith is all-powerful, because it is not surprising that God should do what He will. But this faith, so great in its effects and so prodigious in its nature, can be nothing short of a creation of God in the soul (a man who believes is something more astonishing than a new world formed by the hand of God): how can we obtain it? By asking for it. God gives it to whosoever asks. But here, my dear friends, we must take care. It may be thought that this is a faith very easily obtained, and that it suffices, at the moment you may require faith, to put up a prayer to God to obtain it. No, no; the gifts of God are not so cheap. It sometimes pleases Him, doubtless, in order to show what He is, to create a new man immediately, in answer to a single prayer; but this is not the ordinary way of His providence. This faith, though given in answer to our prayers, is the result of a long and laborious conflict, and it is well worthy of it. God will have us labour to obtain it. Adam says in his "Private Thoughts" what is very true: "Nothing is more easy than to say the words of a prayer; but to pray, hungering and thirsting, is the hardest of all works." It is by being often upon our knees, by reiterating our prayers, by showing God that we feel the value of faith, and by adding to prayer the exercise of it, that we receive in answer to a first prayer a little faith, by which we are encouraged to more fervent prayer, which will again obtain a new measure of it, that we shall attain to the full measure of faith. To grow in faith, we have three things to do—to ask it, to exercise it, and to contemplate examples of it in the great saints by a deep study of the Scriptures. We must not hope to obtain anything from God, if we do not feel the value of it.

Now, this is the application I want briefly to make of what I have said. We must gather faith for the future. We must labour to-day to have the faith that we may require in five, ten, twenty years. We must gather day by day this spiritual provision, so that, surrounded by the most abundant gifts of God, we have only to open our eyes and stretch out our hands, when the time comes that the strength even to pray shall decline, and our enfeebled body and drooping spirit will be less capable of this terrible struggle, of which faith is the prize and the reward. Ah! do not wait till that solemn period to acquire faith. We can always find it; but let us endeavour to anticipate the evil day by continually increasing our provision and growing every day in faith. I am, my friends, in a condition in which nothing avails me but faith. As our brother said in his prayer (in commencing the service), we have by faith strength, peace, joy! Alas! it is easy to say and to preach at any time that faith should triumph over everything else! But when we are called to single combat with the enemy; when we have all to obtain; when we are called to follow Jesus Christ in the morning into the desert, in the evening to Gethsemane, and in the afternoon to Golgotha,—we feel that it is difficult. Blessed be God, eternally blessed! You would ill understand me if you thought from my speaking thus that God does not uphold me. He upholds me wondrously. But I would have you know beforehand that the conflict is hard, much more so than I thought before I was engaged in it that you may do what I did in my small measure, but which I now wish I had done much more diligently; that you may grow every day in faith; that you may live only to grow in faith; that you may be

before God wholly men of faith and prayer, preparing, by the accomplishment of His will today, for the accomplishment of His will to-morrow. Oh! how my sufferings would be alleviated—how much they are alleviated by the thought that they are useful to you, that the words I have addressed to you in my feebleness have penetrated into your hearts by the Holy Spirit! Oh, my friends, if, few as we are here, we were all men of faith, many eleventh chapters to the Hebrews might be written, without going beyond the limits of this chamber!