

# EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,  
And many Explanatory Notes.

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ST. JOHN. VOL. III.

LONDON:  
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET,  
CAVENDISH SQUARE.  
IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

1873AD

JOHN XX. 11-18.

11 But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down <i>and looked</i> into the sepulchre, 12 And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. 14 And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto	him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hath laid him, and I will take him away. 16 Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. 17 Jesus saith unto her, touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and <i>to</i> my God, and your God. 18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and <i>that</i> he had spoken these things unto her.
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THE interview between the Lord Jesus and Mary Magdalene immediately after His resurrection, described in these verses, is a narrative peculiar to St. John. No other Evangelist has been inspired to record it. Of all the accounts of the appearances of our Lord, after He rose from the dead, none perhaps is so pathetic and touching as this. He that can read this simple story without a deep interest, must have a very cold and unfeeling heart.

We see, first, in these verses, *that those who love Christ most diligently and perseveringly, are those who receive most privileges from Christ's hand.* It is a touching fact, and one to be carefully noted, that Mary Magdalene would not leave the sepulchre, when Peter and John went away to their own home. Love to her gracious Master would not let her leave the place where He had been lain. Where He was now she could not tell. What had become of Him she did not know. But love made her linger about the empty tomb, where Joseph and Nicodemus had lately laid Him. Love made her honour the last place where His precious body had been seen by mortal eyes. And her love reaped a rich reward. She saw the angels whom Peter and John had never observed. She actually heard them speak, and had soothing words addressed to her. She was the first to see our Lord after He rose from the dead, the first to hear His voice, the first to hold conversation with Him. Can anyone doubt that this was written for our learning? Wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the world, this little incident testifies that those who honour Christ will be honoured by Christ.

As it was in the morning of the first Easter day, so will it be as long as the Church stands. The great principle contained in the passage before us, will hold good until the Lord comes again. All believers have not the same degree of faith, or hope, or knowledge, or courage, or wisdom; and it is vain to expect it. But it is a certain fact that those who love Christ most fervently, and cleave to Him most closely, will always enjoy most communion with

Him, and feel most of the witness of the Spirit in their hearts. It is precisely those who wait on the Lord, in the temper of Mary Magdalene, to whom the Lord will reveal Himself most fully, and make them know and feel more than others. To know Christ is good; but to “know that we know Him” is far better.

We see, secondly, in these verses, *that the fears and sorrows of believers are often quite needless*. We are told that Mary stood at the sepulchre weeping, and wept as if nothing could comfort her. She wept when the angels spoke to her: “Woman,” they said, “why weepest thou?”—She was weeping still when our Lord spoke to her: “Woman,” He also said, “why weepest thou?”—And the burden of her complaint was always the same: “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.”—Yet all this time her risen Master was close to her, with “body, flesh, and bones, and all things pertaining to the perfection of man’s nature.” (Article IV.) Her tears were needless. Her anxiety was unnecessary. Like Hagar in the wilderness, she had a well of water by her side, but she had not eyes to see it.

What thoughtful Christian can fail to see, that we have here a faithful picture of many a believer’s experience? How often we are anxious when there is no just cause for anxiety! How often we mourn over the absence of things which in reality are within our grasp, and even at our right hand! Two-thirds of the things we fear in life never happen at all, and two-thirds of the tears we shed are thrown away, and shed in vain. Let us pray for more faith and patience, and allow more time for the full development of God’s purposes. Let us believe that things are often working together for our peace and joy, which seem at one time to contain nothing but bitterness and sorrow. Old Jacob said at one time of his life, “all these things are against me” (Gen. xlii. 36); yet he lived to see Joseph again, rich and prosperous, and to thank God for all that had happened. If Mary had found the seal of the tomb unbroken, and her Master’s body lying cold within, she might well have wept! The very absence of the body which made her weep, was a token for good, and a cause of joy for herself and all mankind.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, *what low and earthly thoughts of Christ may creep into the mind of a true believer*. It seems impossible to gather any other lesson from the solemn words which our Lord addressed to Mary Magdalene, when He said, “Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.”—No doubt the language is somewhat mysterious, and ought to be delicately and reverently handled. Yet it is only reasonable to suppose that the first surprise, and the reaction from great sorrow to great joy, was more than the mind of Mary could bear. She was only a woman, though a holy and faithful woman. It is highly probable that, in the first excess of her joy, she threw herself at our Lord’s feet, and made greater demonstrations of feeling than were seemly or becoming. Very likely she behaved too much

like one who thought all must be right if she had her Lord's bodily presence, and all must be wrong in His bodily absence. This was not the highest style of faith. She acted, in short, like one who forgot that her Master was God as well as man. She made too little of His divinity, and too much of His humanity. And hence she called forth our Lord's gentle rebuke, "Touch Me not! There is no need of this excessive demonstration of feeling. I am not yet ascending to my Father for forty days: your present duty is not to linger at my feet, but to go and tell my brethren that I have risen. Think of the feelings of others as well as of your own."

After all, we must confess that the fault of this holy woman was one into which Christians have always been too ready to fall. In every age there has been a tendency in the minds of many, to make too much of Christ's bodily presence, and to forget that He is not a mere earthly friend, but one who is "God over all, blessed forever," as well as man. The pertinacity with which Romanists and their allies cling to the doctrine of Christ's real corporal presence in the Lord's Supper, is only another exhibition of Mary's feeling when she wanted Christ's body, or no Christ at all. Let us pray for a right judgment in this matter, as in all other things concerning our Lord's person. Let us be content to have Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, and present when two or three are met in His name, and to wait for the *real presence* of Christ's body till He comes again. What we really need is not His literal flesh, but His Spirit. It is not for nothing that it is written, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing." "If we have known Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth know we Him no more." (John vi. 63; 2 Cor. v. 16.)

We see, lastly, in these verses, *how kindly and graciously our Lord speaks of His disciples*. He bids Mary Magdalene carry a message to them as "His brethren." He bids her tell them that His Father was their Father, and His God their God. It was but three days before that they had all forsaken Him shamefully, and fled. Yet this merciful Master speaks as if all was forgiven and forgotten. His first thought is to bring back the wanderers, to bind up the wounds of their consciences, to reanimate their courage, to restore them to their former place. This was indeed a love that passeth knowledge. To trust deserters, and to show confidence in backsliders, was a compassion which man can hardly understand. So true is that word of David: "Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." (Psalm ciii. 13, 14.)

Let us leave the passage with the comfortable reflection that Jesus Christ never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. As He dealt with His erring disciples in the morning of His resurrection, so will He deal with all who believe and love Him, until He comes again. When we wander out of the way He will bring us back. When we fall He will raise us again. But he will never break His royal word: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no

wise cast out.” (John vi. 37.) The saints in glory will have one anthem in which every voice and heart will join: “He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” (Psalm ciii. 10.)

NOTES. JOHN XX. 11-18.

11.—[*But Mary stood without...weeping.*] The question naturally arises, “Why did not Mary go away from the tomb with Peter and John?”—The answer to that question must probably be found in the curiously different temperaments of men and women. Mary acted like a woman, and Peter and John acted like men. The head of a woman is generally weaker than that of a man, but the affections are generally stronger.—In the case before us the heart of Mary was not satisfied. Her mind was not convinced, like that of John, that our Lord had risen from the dead. It was not enough for her to know that the body was gone, and the tomb empty, and something wonderful had occurred, as it was for Peter. Her strong love and gratitude towards our Lord made her linger near the tomb, in the faint hope that something might yet turn up to explain where the body was gone. At any rate she could not tear herself away from the place where her Master’s body had last been seen, and when Peter and John departed she stayed behind, like a real warm-hearted woman, and gave a natural vent to her feelings in tears. She felt as if she must see something, before she could be satisfied, and so lingered near the grave, perhaps hardly knowing what she expected to see. The Lord had compassion on her. Her deep love was richly rewarded.

On Mary staying at the sepulchre, Andrews remarks, “The going of Peter and John commends Mary’s staying behind. To the grave she came before them, from the grave she went to tell them, to the grave she returned with them, at the grave she remains behind them.” “To stay, while others do so, while company stays, that is the world’s love. But Peter is gone, and John too; all are gone and she left alone. Thus to stay is love, and constant love.”

Epiphanius an ancient writer (A. D. 390), according to Heinsius, maintains the monstrous theory that the Mary here spoken of is the mother of our Lord, and not Mary Magdalene! It is well to know that the ancient Fathers were not always wise, and are certainly not infallible in expounding Scripture.

Tholuck thinks that Mary did not go to the sepulchre with Peter and John, but followed them alone, more slowly. This is possible; but I rather doubt it.

[*And as she wept...stooped...sepulchre.*] How long Mary wept, after she was left alone, we are left to conjecture. Probably not very long. At last it came into her mind to stoop down and look into the grave, through the small door or opening against which the stone had been rolled. It is worth noticing that we are not told that she had either entered, or looked into the sepulchre, before. Up to this time apparently she had only heard the report of Peter and John. Now, left alone, she probably felt a natural curiosity and anxiety to see with her own eyes what they had reported, and so, in the middle of her weeping, she stooped down and looked in, and at once saw a wondrous sight.

I think Mary’s case teaches us that heart is of more value in God’s sight than intellect. Those who feel most and love most get most privileges. The more we love, the more we are like to Christ.

12.—[*And seeth two angels...white...sitting. etc.*] The incident here recorded is very remarkable and interesting. Mary saw figures in white sitting inside the grave. They evidently looked like men, but they were in reality angels,—two of those mysterious ministering spirits whom the Bible teaches us God is pleased to employ on great occasions. An angel announced the coming birth of John Baptist and of Christ himself. Angels told the shepherds

that Christ was born. Angels ministered to our Lord after the temptation, and an angel strengthened him in Gethsemane. And now also angels appeared in the day of our Lord's resurrection. They first announced that He was born, and they again, after thirty-three years, announced that He was risen.

The whole subject of angels is very deep and mysterious, and one about which we must beware of holding anything that is not revealed. But the case before us teaches one or two wonderful things, which we should do well to remember. These angels evidently came and went away, appeared and disappeared, after a manner supernatural, invisible, and inexplicable to our minds. It is clear that angels were at the tomb, when the party of women arrived there, after Mary Magdalene had run to tell Peter and John. It is equally clear that they were not to be seen, when Peter and John ran to the grave on hearing Mary's report. Not one word do we read of their seeing angels. Yet it is equally clear that when Mary Magdalene looked in, after Peter and John went away, she saw two angels and talked with them. These are very deep things. They prove plainly that the angels of God appear and disappear, are visible or invisible, instantaneously and supernaturally, according as God commissions them. In short they are beings of a totally different nature to our own, and are in all the conditions of their constitution totally unlike us. For anything we know, they were in the tomb when Peter and John inspected it, but at that moment were invisible. For anything we know, they are now very near us every minute of our existence, and doing God's will concerning us, though we are utterly unaware of their presence. All this no doubt is very mysterious, and past the power of man to explain and comprehend. One thing, however, is very certain. Neither here nor elsewhere do we ever find the slightest warrant in Scripture for praying to angels, any more than to dead saints, or for giving them the smallest portion of worship, as if they were divine. Like ourselves, after all, they are only God's creatures.

The expression "in white," means literally "in white robes or garments." It is an adjective and we are left to supply the substantive. The Holy Ghost here abstains from telling us the precise fashion of apparel which these angels wore. The garment worn by the angel mentioned in Mark, at the resurrection, was a long stole or flowing robe. (Mark xvi. 5.) It is worth noticing that "white" was the colour of the Lord's raiment in the transfiguration, and which is the colour in which the angels always seem to have appeared. It need hardly be said that the colour is symbolical of that perfect purity and freedom from defilement, which is the character of the inhabitants of heaven. It will be the garment of the saved souls in glory. (Rev. iii. 4; vii. 9.)

The attitude in which the angels were seen by Mary deserves attention. "Sitting one at the head and the other at the feet," where our Lord's body had lain, they would seem to have been placed there by God as watchmen and guards over the sacred body of our Lord; during the time He was in the grave. It is written, "He shall give His angels charge over Thee." (Psalm xci. 11.)

Some have thought that the position of the angels points to that of the Cherubim, who sat on the two ends of the mercy-seat, over the ark, with their faces toward each other. (Exod. xxv. 20; 2 Chron. iii. 13.)

Bengel thinks that this "sitting" was meant to intimate that their work was done. This seems to me doubtful, because angels need no rest.

Cyril thinks that the attitude of the two angels was meant to show Mary, that our Lord's body had been safely guarded by them, and that no one could have stolen it away against their consent. If one angel could slay 180,000 of Sennacherib's army, what could two do?

Andrews observes, "We learn that between the angels there was no striving for places. He that sat at the feet was as well content with his place, as he that sat at the head. We should

learn from their example. With us both angels would have been at the head, and never a one at the feet. With us none would be at the feet by his good will: we must be head-angels all!”

- 13.—[*And they say unto her, Woman, why, etc.*] The address of the angels to Mary is that of gentle and kind inquiry. We cannot doubt that they knew well why she wept. They ask the question in order to stir up in her mind self-inquiry, as to whether she had cause to weep or not. “What is the reason of this excessive lamentation? Search your own heart. Are you quite sure that this empty tomb does not show that you ought to be rejoicing?”

Mary’s reply to the angels is almost word for word what she had told Peter and John, only in the singular number. It shows plainly that the one thing that weighed on her mind was the disappearance of our Lord’s body, and her ignorance what had become of it. Of His resurrection she evidently had no idea at present. Her only thought was that his body was dead, that it had been taken away, and that she wanted to know where it was. To this one notion she sticks, and not even the appearance of angels can make her give it up. And yet the good woman must have often heard our Lord foretell His death and resurrection. How slow we are to give up long-standing prejudices! How backward to receive truths which contradict our little private systems of religion!

It should be observed that Mary told Peter and John that “the Lord” was taken away. When she speaks to the angels here, she says, “My Lord.” In both cases she speaks indefinitely of “they,” without indicating whom she means.

The calmness of manner with which Mary speaks to these two angels can hardly fail to strike us. She cannot have supposed that they were two men only, whether enemies or friends. The mere fact that Peter and John had not seen them in the grave, must surely have shown her that they were angels. Yet she answers their question without hesitation, like one who feared nothing in her anxiety about her Lord. May we not however consider that a belief in the reality and ministry of angels was far more common among Jews than it is among Christians? They perhaps believed too much about them. It may be feared that we go into the opposite extreme, and believe too little.

Andrews remarks on Mary’s needless weeping, “All was in error: tears of grief,—but false grief, imagining that to be which was not, and Him to be dead which was alive. She weeps, because she finds the grave empty, which, God forbid she should have found full, for then Christ must have been dead still, and there would be no resurrection. And this case of Mary Magdalene is our case oftentimes. It is the error of our conceit to weep when we have no cause, and to joy when we have as little. False joys and false sorrows, false hopes and false fears, this life of ours is full of. God help us!”

- 14.—[*And when...turned...back...saw Jesus standing.*] Why Mary turned back at this moment we are not told. I feel no doubt there was some reason. The Greek words are very emphatical: “She turned to the things or places behind her.” (a) It may be that she turned away from the questioners, as not caring to continue conversation with them. (b) It may be that she heard a footstep behind her, and turned to see who it was. (c) It may be that the shadow of some one behind her fell on the entrance to the tomb. The sun would be in the east, and if the tomb faced that way, its horizontal rays would throw the shadow of any person behind her on the tomb. (d) It may be that she observed some gesture or motion on the part of the angels with whom she was talking, which told her that someone was behind her. Who can tell but these holy spirits, who doubtless recognized the Lord, rose respectfully from their sitting position, as soon as they saw Jesus appear. I like this last solution best, for my own part. I cannot for a moment suppose that the angels would remain sitting motionless, when Jesus appeared. And I believe that Mary, as she talked with them, detected at once by their altered manner, that there was someone behind her. This it was that made her “turn herself back.” Such little touches give a wonderful life and reality to the whole narrative, in my

judgment.

Chrysostom observes, "While Mary was speaking, Christ suddenly appearing behind her, struck the angels with awe; and they, beholding their Ruler, showed immediately by their bearing, their look, their movements, that they saw the Lord. This drew the woman's attention, and caused her to turn."

The same view is taken by Athanasius, Theophylact, Brentius, Gerhard, and Andrews.

[*And knew not that it was Jesus.*] There are but three ways in which we can explain Mary not recognizing Christ at once. (*a*) She was weeping bitterly, and her eyes were dim with tears. This, however, seems very improbable. (*b*) It was not broad day-light yet, and it was too dusky to distinguish any one. This is Cyril's view; but it can hardly be correct, considering all that had already occurred this Sunday morning. (*c*) Her eyes were holden supernaturally, like those of the disciples walking to Emmaus, so that she did not distinguish the figure before her to be that of our Lord. This appears to me by far the most likely solution, miraculous as the circumstance certainly was. But the condition of our Lord's risen body was altogether different from that of His body before crucifixion. We cannot pretend to explain in the least where He was, and what He was doing in the intervals between His various appearances, during the forty days before His ascension. We need not therefore hesitate to believe that He could assume such an appearance, that even a disciple like Mary did not recognize Him at first, or that He could cause her eyes to be unable to distinguish Him, even when close to her.

After all, what a striking emblem this little incident supplies of the spiritual experience of hundreds of Christ's believing people even at this very day. How many are ever mourning and sorrowing, and have no comfort in their religion, while Christ is close to them. But they do not know it, and, like Mary, go on weeping.

15.—[*Jesus saith... Why weepest thou...seekest thou?*] The first question that Jesus asked of Mary was precisely the same that the angels had asked. "Woman, why art thou weeping? Art thou quite sure that thou art right to weep over this empty grave, and oughtest not rather to rejoice?"—The second question was even more searching than the first. "Whom seekest thou? Who is this person that thou art seeking among the dead? Hast thou not forgotten that He whom thou seekest is one who has power to take life again, and who predicted that He would rise?"—I must think that in both these questions there was a gentle latent reproof intended for this holy woman. Faithful and loving as she was, she had too much forgotten her Master's teaching about His death and resurrection. These questions were meant to rouse her to a recollection of things often said in her hearing. Of course our Lord knew perfectly well why she was weeping, and whom she was seeking. He needed not to ask her. He asked for her benefit rather than His own information. But excessive grief has an absorbing and stupefying effect on the mind and memory. Mary could think of nothing but that her Lord's body was gone, and this swallowed up all her thoughts.

[*She supposing Him, etc.*] Here we see what Mary's first thought was, when she heard a strange voice, and saw a strange figure. She catches at the idea that this person may be the keeper of the garden in which Joseph's sepulchre was, and that, having probably been keeping watch over the garden all night, he may know what had become of her Master's body, or may even have removed it himself. "Sir," she says, "If thou art the person who has taken away my Lord out of the tomb, only tell me where thou hast carried His body, and I will take Him away."—Once more we see that this holy woman could only think of her Master as one dead, and that her one absorbing idea was how she could recover His corpse and do it honour. As for His resurrection and victory over death, she seems utterly unable to get hold of it at present. Wonderful is it to see how much of Christ's teaching was apparently thrown away on His disciples, and clean forgotten! Ministers who complain of the igno-

rance of their hearers, should learn patience, when they mark the imperfect knowledge of Christ's own followers.

The Greek word rendered "Sir," in this verse, might have been equally correctly rendered "Lord." But it is rendered "Sir," in like manner; in the conversation between our Lord and the Samaritan woman, in the fourth chapter of this Gospel. In both cases it is a term of respect, such as a Jewish woman would address to a man.

It is noteworthy that Mary does not name her Master to the supposed gardener. She simply says "Him,"—"if thou hast borne *Him* hence, I will take *Him*, away." It is the language of one so absorbed in the thought of our Lord, that she thinks it needless to name Him; and assumes, as a matter of course, that the gardener will understand whom she means.

It is noteworthy that Mary talks of "taking Him away." How one weak woman like her could suppose that she was able to lift and carry away the dead body of a man, we cannot of course understand. It is clear that she either meant (*a*) that she would soon find friends who would remove the body, or else (*b*) that she spoke hurriedly, fervently, impulsively, and passionately, without reflecting on what she was saying. I incline to think the latter view is the correct one.

Luther, quoted by Besser, remarks on this verse, "Mary's heart was so filled up with Christ and thoughts about Christ, that besides Him she neither hears nor sees anything. She is not frightened at the sight of angels. She addresses Christ abruptly, supposing Him to be the gardener; and if he has taken Him away, she is ready to carry Him back to the sepulchre."

Andrews observes, "*Him* is enough with love. Who knows not who it is, though we never tell His name, nor say a word more?"

16.—[*Jesus saith, unto her, Mary, etc.*] We are here told how our Lord at last revealed Himself to this faithful disciple, after her patience, love, and boldness had been fully proved. Little as she had shown herself able to understand the great truth of her Saviour's resurrection, she had at any rate shown that none loved Him more, or clung to Him more tenaciously, than she did. And she had her reward. One single word was enough to open her eyes, to let the whole truth shine in upon her mind, and to reveal the great fact that her Saviour was not dead but alive, and that He had won a victory over the grave.—Speaking in His usual well-known voice, our Lord addressed her by her name,—the name by which, no doubt, He had often addressed her before. That single word touched a spring, as it were, and opened her eyes in a moment. Need we doubt that at once the whole world seemed turned upside down to the astonished woman; and that under the influence of such an amazing revulsion of feeling as that much-loved voice must have caused, her mind could only find expression in one passionate word—"Rabboni," or Master.

The expression, "turned herself," in this verse, is rather curious. We know, from the fourteenth verse, that Mary had already turned once from the grave, when Jesus appeared behind her. Here again we are told that she "turned herself." The simplest explanation seems to be, that when she did not recognize the person who spoke to her, and thought He had been the gardener, she partially turned away, as a woman naturally would from a strange man, and hardly looked at Him, while she spoke of taking the body away. But the moment the voice of Jesus sounded in her ears, she turned again directly to Him, and made some movement towards Him, as she uttered the cry, "Rabboni."—Thus there were three movements: first, a turning round to see who was behind her; second, a partial turning away, when she heard a voice she did not recognize; and finally, a quick, passionate turning round entirely, when the well-known voice of her Master said, "Mary." So at least it appears to me.

Chrysostom says, "It seems to me that after having said, Where hath thou laid Him?" she turned to the angels to ask why they were astonished; and that then Christ, by calling her by name, turned her back to Himself from them, and revealed Himself by His voice."

The boundless compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ to His believing people comes out wonderfully in this verse. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows how weak our bodily frame is, and how much excessive sorrow can unnerve and stupefy our minds. He can pass over much darkness of understanding, much slowness of comprehension, when He sees real, genuine, hearty, bold, persevering, thorough love to Himself and His Person. We see this prominently brought out in His dealing with Mary Magdalene, when He revealed Himself to her. He graciously pardons her forgetfulness of His oft-repeated declaration that He would rise again after His death, pities her deep sorrow, and abundantly rewards her love. These things are written for our learning. Jesus never changes. What He was, when He revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene, He is at this day.

Rabboni, according to Parkhurst, "is nearly of the same import as Rabbi. St. John explains both by the same word,—teacher. But Lightfoot and others say it was a term of higher respect." Parkhurst thinks it is formed from the Chaldee, and includes the idea, "MY Master."

- 17.—[*Jesus saith...Touch Me not...my Father.*] This saying of our Lord is undeniably a very "deep thing," and the real meaning of it is a point which has greatly perplexed commentators. I suspect it is one of those things which will never be fully settled until the Lord comes. In the meantime we must be content to make humble conjectures. It will clear our way to remember that our Lord could not possibly mean by saying, "Touch Me not," that there was anything sinful or wrong in Mary touching His risen body. The mere fact that a few minutes after this interview with Mary, he allowed the other women who had been to the grave to "hold Him by the feet" (Matt. xxviii. 9), completely settles that point. Moreover, within a week after this very day, He says to Thomas, "Reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side." (John xx. 27.) This alone entirely contradicts the notion that our Lord's body might not be touched before His ascension. But having cleared the way negatively, the question yet remains, "What did our Lord mean positively?"

In order to understand the meaning of "Touch Me not," we must try to realize the state of mind in which Mary Magdalene was, when our Lord revealed Himself to her. A very slight knowledge of human nature, and especially of woman's nature, will tell us that the sudden discovery that Jesus was alive and standing before her, would throw her into a violent state of excitement, and produce an immense revulsion of feeling, from deep despondency to extravagant joy. May we not well believe that under the influence of this excitement, this holy woman might be more demonstrative than was seemly, and might exhibit her feelings by actions and gestures that our Lord saw it absolutely needful to repress? Can we not understand that a warm-hearted, impulsive Jewish woman, holy and pure-minded as she certainly was, would be likely to cast herself at our Lord's feet, to say the least, in a passionate ecstasy of delight, and to hold them fast, kissing and embracing them, like the woman in Simon's house, as if she would never let them go? —And can we not well understand that our wise Master, who knew all hearts, thought it good to check and repress her, and therefore, for her soul's benefit, and not unkindly, said, "Touch Me not."—Nothing would be more likely to calm the good woman's mind, and to recall her to a reverent sense of what was due to herself and to her Lord, than this prohibition to "touch." Such is my view of this wonderful expression. It is to my mind a very suggestive one, and deserves the especial attention of ministers, in carrying on their private pastoral work. But I forbear. Let it however never be forgotten (and I desire to speak with the utmost reverence and delicacy), that when our Lord allowed the women, mentioned by St. Matthew (Matt. xxviii. 9), to "hold Him by the feet," there were several women present together, and some of them mothers

and not young. When, on the contrary, He said to Mary Magdalene, "Touch Me not," He spoke to one who in all probability was a young woman, and He and she were alone!

The Greek word we render "touch," according to Liddell and Scott's *Lexicon*, frequently means "fasten oneself to, cling to, hang on by, lay hold of, or grasp." Homer constantly uses the word in this sense. This deserves special notice. Schleusner and Parkhurst agree with Liddell and Scott.

The words, "for I am not yet ascended to my Father," are even more difficult than Touch Me not;" and the connection between the two sayings is the hardest knot of all the sentence.

(a) Some think that the sense is, "I have not yet ascended to my Father. Till I have ascended and taken my seat at His right hand, my work as your Saviour is not perfect and complete. Do not therefore touch Me and fasten upon Me, as if you would fain keep Me upon earth forever, now that I have risen again. Remember that my ascension is as much a part of my great work of redemption as my crucifixion and resurrection. I have not yet ascended. Do not, therefore, behave as though you wished to detain Me here below, and never to part with Me again."

(b) Some think that the sense is, "I am not yet ascending to my Father. I shall not ascend for forty days. There will, therefore, be abundant time for seeing, touching, hearing, and conferring with Me. Do not therefore now waste precious time on this eventful morning by embracing my feet, and demonstrating your affection to my person. Rather rise, and lose no time in going to my brethren, and telling them that I am risen. Think of others; and do not occupy yourself, as you are disposed to do, in touching my feet and gratifying your own feelings. Natural as it is, there is other work to do now. Go and do it, and do not linger here. Touch Me not." This is the view of Beza, Brentius, and Bishop Hall.

(c) Some think, as Melancthon, that our Lord had in view His second advent and kingdom, when all who have known and loved Him on earth, shall at length dwell with Him in holy familiarity, and go out from His presence no more. Melancthon says, "It is as if Christ would say, Then shall you touch Me, when I have ascended to my Father that is, when I shall bring thee and all my Church to the Father at the last day. Another kingdom and another life remains yet to be given, in which you shall enjoy fellowship with Me and my Father."

I honestly confess that I find it almost impossible to say which of the three opinions I have here described deserves most attention. If I must decide, I incline to prefer the second one, and I think it is more in keeping with the latter part of the verse. The weakest point of this view is the future sense which it puts on the words, "I am not ascended." The Greek word is in the perfect tense, and the perfect is undoubtedly used sometimes in the sense of a future. (Compare Rom. xiv. 23, John xvii. 10; and see Telf's *Greek Grammar*, vol. ii., p. 65; and Winer's *Grammar*, p. 288. Clark's edition.) But it is rather awkward that "I ascend" comes immediately after in the present tense. The reader must decide for himself which view he prefers.

Chrysostom says, "Methinks Mary wished still to converse with Jesus as before, and in her joy perceived nothing great in Him, although He had become far more excellent in the flesh. To lead her therefore from this idea, and that she might speak to Him with awe (for neither with the disciples doth He henceforth appear so familiar as before), He raiseth her thoughts, that she should give more reverent heed to Him. To have said, 'Approach Me not as you did before, for matters are not in the same state; nor shall I henceforth be with you in the same way,' would have been harsh and high-sounding. But the saying, 'I am not yet ascended to my Father,' though not painful to hear, was the same thing. For by saying, 'I am not yet ascended,' He showeth that He hasteth and passeth thither, and that it was not meet that one about to depart thither, and no longer to converse with men, should be looked

on with the same feelings as before.”

Augustine says, “There is a spiritual meaning latent here.—Either this is so spoken, ‘Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended,’ that the woman is a figure of the Church of the Gentiles, which did not believe on Christ until He was ascended unto the Father;—or else Jesus would have men so believe in Him, or touch Him spiritually, as knowing that Himself and the Father are one.—Mary might believe in such a way as if she thought Him unequal to the Father, which thought is forbidden to her. ‘Touch Me not’: *i e.*, Do not believe in Me in such wise as thou art yet minded in thy thoughts of Me: let not thy perception reach only to the thing I was made for thee, without passing beyond to that by which thou wast made. I am not yet ascended to my Father. Then shalt thou touch Me, when thou believest Me to be God not unequal to the Father.”

Calvin says, “The meaning of these words is, that Christ’s state of resurrection would not be full and complete, until He should sit down in heaven at the right hand of the Father. Therefore Mary did wrong in satisfying herself with having nothing more than the half of His resurrection, and desiring only to enjoy His presence in the world.”

Lightfoot says, “These words relate to what Christ had spoken formerly about sending the Comforter, and that He would not leave them comfortless, but would come to them. Christ says to Mary, I must first ascend to my Father, before I can bestow those things upon you which I have promised. Do not therefore touch Me, and *detain* Me upon any expectation of that kind. Rather wait for my ascension, and go and tell the same thing to my brethren for their encouragement.”

Poole says, “The best opinion seems to be the opinion of those who think our Saviour saw Mary too fond, as if she thought He had been raised up to such a converse with them as He had before His death. This error is all He tasks her of, not forbidding any kind of touching, so as to satisfy herself He was truly risen, but restraining any gross conception.—He reminded Mary that He was about to ascend to His Father, though He had not yet ascended, and was therefore not to be enjoyed by them with so much freedom and familiarity as before.”

Bishop Hall says, “There may be a kind of carnality in spiritual notions. ‘If I have known Christ after the flesh, from henceforth I know Him no more.’ That Thou livedst here, my Saviour, in this shape, that colour, this stature, that habit, I should be glad to know: nothing that concerns Thee can be unuseful. Could I say, here Thou satest, here Thou layest, here Thou wast crucified, here Thou wast buried, I should with much content see and recount those ceremonials of Thy presence. But if I shall so fasten my thoughts on them, as not to look higher, to the spiritual part of these achievements, to the power and issue of Thy resurrection, I am none the better.”

Rollock says, “The meaning in effect is this. It is not time for thee to touch Me now, till that time I be in glory, and then touch Me by the arm of faith as much as thou canst or mayest. Ye must consider that she was too much addicted to His bodily presence. She thought He should have remained and dwelt on earth as He did before. Therefore He would not let her come near Him, until He instructed her of a spiritual touching, and that He was not to stay here, but to dwell with His Father in heaven.

“Mark this lesson. Some men love the Lord entirely, and yet when they come to His service they fail: for such is the grossness of our nature that we cannot incline to that spiritual service which He chiefly requires. Popery is full of this grossness. They can do nothing if they have not His carnal presence, either in Himself, or in a stock or stone, or in a piece of bread, and therefore they draw a bodily presence of Him in the sacrament. All their religion is earthly,—no grace, no spirit in it. But did the Lord accept that gross service that Mary offered? I am certain He loved Mary better than the Pope and all his priests; yet well as He

liked Mary, He liked not her service. He says to her, Touch Me not! The Lord keep us from gross service, and make us touch Him by faith.”

Andrews says, “The most we can make is that here Mary failed in somewhat. Not that she did it in any immodest or indecent manner. God forbid! Never think of that. But she was only a little too forward, it may be not with the due respect that was meet.”—“I tell you plainly I do not like her Rabboni. It was no Easter-day salutation; it should have been some better term, expressing more reverence.”—“The touch was not the right touch, and all for want of expressing more regard; not for want of reverence at all, but of reverence enough.”—“it is no excuse to say it was all out of love. Never lay it upon that. Love, Christ loves well. But love, if it be right, doth nothing uncomely, keeps decorum, forgets not what belongs to duty and decency, carries itself accordingly.” —“A strange kind of love, when for very love to Christ we care not how we use Him, or carry ourselves toward Him. Which, being Mary’s case, she heard and heard quickly. Touch Me not,—you are not now in case till you shall have learned to touch after a more regardful manner.

Sibbes says, “Mary was too much addicted to Christ’s bodily presence. It is this that men have laboured for from the beginning of the world,—to be too much addicted to present things and to sense. They will worship Christ; but they must have a picture before them. They will adore Christ; but they must bring His body down to a piece of bread: they must have a presence. And so instead of raising their hearts to God and Christ in a heavenly manner, they pull down God and Christ to them. And, therefore, saith Christ, ‘Touch Me not in that manner: it is not with Me as it was before.’ We must take heed of mean and base conceits of Christ.”

Sherlock, in his “Trial of the Witnesses,” says, “The natural sense of this place is this: Mary Magdalene, upon seeing Jesus fell at His feet and laid hold on them, and held them as if she never meant to let them go. Then Christ said to her, “Touch Me not, or hang not about Me now. You will have other opportunities of seeing Me, for I go not yet to my Father. Lose no time then, but go quickly with my message to my brethren.”

West, on the Resurrection, says, “I take Christ’s forbidding Mary to touch Him, to have been meant as a signification of His intention to see her and the disciples again; just as in ordinary life, when one friend says to another, ‘Do not take leave for I am not going yet,’ he means to let him know that he purposes to see him again before he sets out on his journey.”

Lampe mentions a strange view of “Touch Me not” maintained by Bauldry, a German professor. He would put a full stop at “not,” and place it first in the sentence, rendering it “No! I am not the gardener. Touch Me, and see that I am Thy Saviour risen.” He also mentions a view held by many, that it means, “Do not try whether I am risen by touching Me. It is I myself.” Both views, however, seem very improbable.

Paulus, the German theologian, maintains the monstrous notion that our Lord meant, “Do not lay a finger on Me, because my wounds still smart.” This is simply ridiculous, to say the least.

Hengstenberg says, “The reason of the prohibition must be sought in the personal character of Mary, and in the passionate nature of the touch which sprang from that character. She thought that the limits which had formerly existed between herself and the Lord (*the old style of confidence is a very incorrect idea*) were, now that the Saviour had passed into another form of existence, removed, and that she might now give free course to her feelings without fearing the admixture of anything human in her sentiment toward her Lord. But her Lord repelled her: Touch Me not.”

Wordsworth says, “The term (in the Greek) indicates not only a prohibition of a particular act, but forbids a habit: *i.e.*, of clinging to Him with a bodily touch. And the words, ‘I have not ascended,’ contain a precept concerning the time when the habit of touching Christ

may be exercised. He is to be touched after He has ascended,— that is, He is then to be truly touched, when He is beyond the reach of the bodily touch. And one of the purposes of His absence and His ascension into heaven was to elicit and exercise that touch,—the touch of faith.”

Burton remarks what a strange thing it is, that “both the old world and the new should have begun with the same prohibition, *Touch not.*”

[*But go...my brethren...say unto them.*] This sentence is strikingly full of wisdom, tender thoughtfulness, and kindness. Wisely our Lord summons Mary Magdalene to an act of duty to others. He bids her not spend time in demonstrations of affection, but arise and be useful.—Thoughtfully our Lord’s first consideration is for His poor scattered disciples. Weak and erring as they had been, He still loved them, and at once sends them a message. He did not mean to cast them off, or forget them.—Kindly He calls them “my brethren.” All was pardoned and forgiven. He still regarded them as His dear brethren,—risen, conqueror over the grave as He was,—and would have them look on Him as an elder brother. This is the first time our Lord ever called the disciples “brethren.”

Bucer thinks that “my brethren” in this place really means “my brethren according to the flesh:” *i.e.*, James and others, whose faith was weaker perhaps than that of the other Apostles. But the vast majority of commentators see in the expression nothing of the kind, and regard it only as a term of affection applied to all the Apostles. Calvin properly refers us to Psalm xxii. 22: “I will declare thy name unto my brethren.” See also Heb. ii. 11.

Andrews remarks that the words “my brethren” was “a word to be touched and taken hold of. It was so once when Benhadad’s servant laid hold on the word of the King of Israel, ‘He is my brother.’” (1 Kings xx. 32, 33.) He adds that it implied identity of nature, and identity of love and affection after the resurrection, and no change.

Let us mark what a strong proof we have here of the duty of telling others the good news of the Gospel. The very first work that a risen Christ proposes to the first disciple to whom He revealed Himself is the work of telling others. It was a deep saying of the four leprosy men: “This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us.” (2 Kings vii. 9.)

Cyril remarks what an honour was put on woman, when a woman was commissioned to be the first person to proclaim the tidings of the resurrection.

[*I ascend...my Father...your God.*] The message which our Lord desires Mary to carry to His disciples is remarkable. He does not bid her say “I have risen,” but “I ascend.” He would evidently have them understand that His resurrection was only a step towards His ascension, and that He did not rise again in order to tarry with them upon earth, but in order to go up to heaven as a conqueror, and sit down at God’s right hand as their forerunner, representative, priest, advocate, and friend. The message is clearly elliptical. It is as though our Lord said, “Say unto them that I have risen from the dead, and that I am soon about to ascend into heaven, to Him who is my Father and my God, and their Father and their God also.”

When our Lord dwells on His ascension more than His resurrection, it seems to me that He names it as the great conclusion and accomplishment of the work He came to do, and the necessary consequence of His rising again. It is as though He said, “My work is finished, my battle is won, and I shall not be much longer with you in the world. Get ready to receive my last instructions.”

Calvin says, “Christ forbids the Apostles to fix their whole attention on His resurrection viewed simply in itself, but exhorts them to proceed further, until they come to the spiritual kingdom, the heavenly glory, and God Himself.”

Andrews remarks, “We ourselves had better lie still in our graves, better never rise, than rise and rising not ascend.”

Flavel remarks, “If Christ had not ascended, He could not have interceded, as He now does in heaven for us. And do but take away Christ’s intercession, and you starve the hope of the saints.”

When our Lord speaks of God as “My Father and my God,” He seems as usual, to point to the close and intimate union which He always declared to exist between Himself and the First Person in the Trinity. “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Peter i. 3), is a kindred expression.—He does not, we should observe, say, I ascend unto “our Father,” etc., but “my Father and your Father.” He thus shows that there is a certain distinction between His relation to the Father and ours. Believers are not naturally sons of God: they only become so by grace, by adoption, and by virtue of union with Christ. Christ, on the contrary, is in His nature the Son of God by an eternal generation.

When our Lord speaks of “Your Father and your God,” He seems to me to speak with a special view to the consolation of His disciples. It is as though He said, “Do not be troubled because I go away. He to whom I go is *your* Father and *your* God as well as mine. All that He is to me, the Head, He is also to you, the members.”

It may well be doubted, when we read this verse, whether Christians, as a rule, assign sufficient importance to the great truth of Christ’s ascension into heaven. Let us never forget that if our Lord had not ascended into heaven, and sat down on the right hand of God, His resurrection would have been but of little value. It is His going into heaven itself, to appear in the presence of God for us, that is the great secret of Christian comfort. It is not for nothing that St. Paul answers the question, “Who is he that condemneth?” by saying, “Christ hath died,—yea, rather hath risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” (Rom. viii. 34.) The death, the resurrection, the ascension, the intercession of Christ, are four great facts that should never be separated.

It ought not to be forgotten that there seems to be a close connection between the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. This, at least, seems to be the meaning of the text in the Psalms, quoted by St. Paul: “When He had ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and received gifts for men.” (Psalm lxxviii. 18. Ephes. iv. 8.)

18.—[*Mary Magdalene came and told, etc.*] In this verse we see the effect that our Lord’s words had on the loving disciple to whom He first appeared. She meekly accepts the reproof of her over-forward zeal to touch Him, without gainsaying or answering again. Like a good servant, she proceeds at once to do what she is told. The use of the present tense shows the promptness of her obedience. The Greek words would be more literally rendered, “Mary Magdalene cometh, telling or declaring to the disciples that she has seen the Lord, and that He has said these things to her,”—that He has given her this message to carry to them, and that He calls them His brethren. The use of the participle makes the words sound as if she went open-mouthed, telling every disciple as she went, and hardly stopping to sit down, till she had told everyone whom she could find in Jerusalem. We need not doubt that the first house she went to was that where Peter and John lodged, and one of the first persons to whom she told the joyful news was the mother of our Lord. A few minutes after she departed on her joyful errand—running, we need not doubt, as she had run before,—our Lord appeared to the other women, as is recorded by St. Matthew. (Matt. xxviii. 9.)

Brentius remarks what honour this passage puts on women. Sin came into the world by Eve, a woman. Yet God, in mercy, ordered things so that of a woman Christ was born, to a woman Christ first appeared after He rose from the dead, and a woman was the first to carry the news of His resurrection. He quaintly says, “Jesus made Mary Magdalene an Apostle to the Apostles.”

Cecil remarks, "Singular honour is reserved for solitary faith. Mary has the first personal manifestation of Christ after His resurrection. She is the first witness of this most important and illustrious fact, and the first messenger of it to His disciples."