

THE GREAT PRAYER.

SHORT CHAPTERS ON JOHN XVII.

BY THE BISHOP OF DURHAM.

V.

OUR brief studies have led us hitherto over the Theism of the Great Prayer and over its Christology. We approach now, in what seems a natural succession, its doctrine of grace, its indications of the secrets and of the characteristics of the life of the disciple, and of the function of the disciple as his Lord's vessel for the carrying of His Name, His vehicle of operation and influence.

The present study, to be true to the Prayer, will take two main directions. The Intercessor has a special regard, in the opening of the Prayer and through the larger part of it, to the disciples then with Him, the apostles. Towards the close He goes out to the uncounted numbers who should become disciples through their message, the long succession of the evangelized and converted even to the end. It will be useful to keep this division in view; and in the present paper we consider accordingly the Lord's intimations about His apostles' secrets and privileges of grace, reserving for the next what He forecasts about those who should "believe on Him through their word." But the two themes cannot be kept rigidly apart. It is clear that much at least which is said directly of the apostles is true of every true disciple. And also much which is distinctly said of the first messengers and witnesses has a valid reference to all disciples of every age who should in any way be their successors. It is most true, and never to be forgotten, that the apostolic company had a position and commission quite distinctive and apart. All of them in their spoken delivery of the message, and the writers among them in that inestimable and peculiar vehicle of revelation, their epistles, were attended with a heavenly guidance over thought and word which made them mouthpieces of their Lord in a sense, with an authority, which has belonged to no later generation.

There is a tendency in the Church just now to forget this, if I see aright. It was not for nothing that an eminent lay Christian said,

not long ago, so I was told, to an eminent ordained Christian, in the course of a discussion: "I see that to you St. Paul is an able writer; to me he is an apostle." Nevertheless, there surely is, within this great limit, an apostolic *succession*. And I allude not only to the monumental fact of the age-long continuity of an ordered and commissioned ministry, pastoral and instructional, drawn as to its origin from the first apostles, however its types may have varied. I have also in mind all the sacred activities within the Christian community which have to do with the living transmission of "the faith once delivered," ranging from fathers, expositors, evangelists, masters of meditation and of sacred song, pastors and missionaries of every order, to the teacher in the Sunday School, and to that true vessel of the Name, the mother with the children at her knee. These all are so far in the succession that through them, through their word, through their living and loving transmission of the word of the Master and of His first and heaven-guided messengers, human souls believe on Him. Who, after all, shall limit the width of this bright line of succession? Putting aside possible cases altogether abnormal, there is no true disciple whose life at least, filled with Christ, inspired by His Gospel received and loved, has not an apostleship of its own, a mission to other lives.

With these recollections awake in us, let us make some simple notes on our Intercessor's words about the privileges and graces of His serving followers.

First we note a mystery, holy but profound, "dark with excess of bright." These men are, in some respect most special, "given by the Father to the Son." "The men Thou gavest Me out of the world; Thine they were and Thou gavest them Me." "I pray for those whom Thou hast given Me." "Holy Father, keep in Thy name that" (that company; so I interpret ver. 11) "which Thou hast given Me." We cannot go astray here, so I venture to affirm, in recognizing that great secret of the will of God, a special dealing with human persons, expressed here as "gift," in other Scriptures as "choice," and such that its reasons lie altogether above our sight. The mystery of a choice to blessing, "not according to our works," according only to "purpose" deep within Deity itself, seems to me to be plainly laid down in revelation as a spiritual fact, and I think we have it here. This becomes a real trouble to faith,

I venture to say, only when we put it out of proportion, distorting it into a truth dominant over all others. Our wisdom, on this side the veil, is to lay it in peace beside other (and more truly dominant) truths, the truths which glow with "tender mercy over all His works" and His "will that none should perish," and rest in the strong assurance that this mighty "antinomy," this defiance to our weak logic, weak because its premisses must be imperfect here below, has a glorious conciliation above the clouds. This "bright cloud" meanwhile, this mystery of "choice" and "gift," is meant for nothing but cheer to the humble soul. It is meant to lift the disciple, awfully conscious of demerit and of weakness, so that he may lean on the transcendent will of Him Who is love, whose purposes of mercy originate wholly in Himself, and draw their loving perseverance always from their origin.

Then, in an utterance deep as that other, but radiant without a cloud, the Lord lets us know, once and for ever, what the way is by which the human being "given to the Son" finds that divine privilege turned into life indeed. "Thou gavest Him authority, that He should give to them eternal life. And this is the life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent."

On this great verse I offer only the simplest comments. Its gracious glory seems to forbid elaborated discourse. Who shall discuss and analyse "eternal life"? Shall we not rather bow down before the words, and let them work as it were inarticulately within these spirits of ours, which our Author made to be responsive to His, and which therefore must be such, in their depth and mystery, as to surpass always our own merely rational insight? Life, eternal life; existence, interminable existence. Yes, only it means much more. It means an existence rich and overflowing with power and love, holy all through; interminable in duration, but not so as to suggest an exhaustion at length like that of a Tithonus, under which the finite ego might ask, as a relief, to cease to be. No; eternal means here a larger and fairer thing than only interminable. It means a correspondence with Him Who (the words only feel for a tangible meaning, but they have their truth) transcends time, and sits above it; to Whom succession is but a mighty harmony; Who can give His creature, in oneness with Himself, a deathless energy and bliss, kept free from the *fatigues* of progress,

because each moment comes to the happy creature from the Creator's unfathomable life of love.

That life awaits its deathless and ever-growing maturity hereafter. But it begins, indeed it begins, here. For its essential, its secret, and also its motion, its experience, is this—to know the Father and the Son; to know the Father as in being and character the absolute and fontal counterpart of the Son, to know the Son as the Beloved of the Father, the gift of the Father, the Christ for us, the Christ in us, Who is the supreme vehicle of the inflow into us of the Father's life of love.

This is a knowledge whose essence is not of the intellectual sort. It is neither to be won nor to be enjoyed by processes of merely mental action. True, it has the very noblest relations with the intellect, when once that intellect has recognized, as a grand fact for reason, that the living God transcends it. In that living God, spiritually known, it will then find for ever matter for apprehending meditation which will lift and refine for ever the intellectual power. But this knowledge of God in Christ, of Christ as one with us and one with God, is in its essence no more merely mental than is a child's knowledge of a mother, a man's knowledge of a perfect human friend. It means an insight (the gift of revealing grace) into the supreme Character. It means the response of trust to the infinitely Faithful. It means the love of Author and Redeemer met on man's part by the love which at once worships and embraces. It means all this developed by the intercourse of faith and obedience, as the disciple "walks with" Him Who is known as an eternal while most tender Father, through Him Who is alike our pardon, our power, and our purity, our King and our Companion, our God and our Brother.

That knowledge, as it deepens, is the path to heaven. And when the end is reached that knowledge will be heaven. "They shall see His face," and, as a result, "His name shall be in their foreheads."

The Prayer has more to say of the happy experts in this immortalizing "knowledge," these assured believers (ver. 8) that the Father sent the Son. It tells us, as we listen, that the Lord Who loves them, and Who now for a season leaves them as to physical presence, well remembers that they have to remain "in the world"; not "of it" (ver. 16), for they have a life now whose spring is in

God, but "in it"; and He commits them solemnly to the Father's keeping power, to be "kept in His Name," surrounded, filled, with that great word, "ABBA." He would have them not only pure and safe, but happy. He "speaks in the world," in these wonderful words of intercession, audible once for all to mortal ears, that they may have "His joy" (ver. 13), His experience of bliss in the obedience of love, "fulfilled in them," in their spirits, as they respond to His. Like Him, they have tasted, and will taste, "the world's hatred," in one form or another; the antagonism which the life true to God must in measure awake in the environment which does not love Him. Yet they are to live, for its own good, in that world, only "kept" from the snares and clutches of "the evil one," its god; so kept, in the life-giving "knowledge," that they are "sanctified in truth," hallowed, consecrated, through and through, to their Lord.

One closing note let us make as we listen: "I am glorified in them" (ver. 10). "O generous love!" These very disciples, with a candour about themselves learnt in their heaven-given "knowledge," never tire, in their Gospel story, of disclosing their own imperfectness. But such is the Lord they "know," so does He know Himself in them, that He does not pity them only, nor even love them only. He is glorified in them. They are His exultation. "On His breast their love He proudly weareth."

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(To be continued.)

STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

X. GOD THE INVITER.

Text.—"He invited you."—2 Thess. ii. 14.

[Book of the Month: Plummer's Commentary on 2 Thessalonians¹
= P2. Other refs., Milligan's Comm. = Mg. Moffatt's Comm.
in *Expos. Gr. Test.* = Mt. Moffatt's Translation of N.T. = M.
Plummer's Comment. on 1 Thess. = P1.]

"God is the great Inviter" (P2. 77); so on 1 Thess. ii. 12, "Walk worthily of the God Who is the Inviter." With "the Inviter"

¹ Published by Robert Scott, 6s. Sterling work, as always with Dr. Plummer.