

## THE GREAT PRAYER.

### SHORT CHAPTERS ON JOHN XVII.

BY THE BISHOP OF DURHAM.

#### VII.

WE approach the Great Prayer for a final meditation. I will not waste space upon remarks over the inevitable meagreness of my commentary all along ; over the omission of one topic and another full of the mind and love of the Intercessor ; over the halting exposition of the topics handled. May He whose words I have presumed to attempt to unfold forgive His servant's best. May his brethren bear with him this once more, as we meet, listening, beside the Apostles. May the disciple's essay to speak about the utterances of the Lord Jesus be forbidden, in mercy, to muffle His own voice.

We closed our last study with the reflection that "the grand prerequisite to a regenerated world is a regenerated Church." The occasion for that remark, in the Great Prayer, was the Lord's repeated intimation that through His disciples, through His life and light in them, as individual souls and as a harmonious company, not through means more abstract, but through Him seen in them, the world should come to "believe that the Father had sent Him." Such, for this present æon or dispensation of His plans, was His purpose. He had the world heavy upon His heart, surely, throughout His intercession. It is true, as we saw in its place, that "He did not pray for the world," immediately, that hour. He prayed for His own. But that was not because the world, the vast complex of fallen humanity around them, was nothing to Him. He was Son of Him who "so loved the world that He gave," to birth and death, that very Son, His Eternal, His Only-begotten, His Beloved, on purpose that salvation might be open to any and every child of the world, believing. The treasures of grace He asked for His own were asked indeed *for them*, for their own life, and holiness, and deathless joy. But they were never asked as for them alone. The believer, the disciple, the saint, was to be saved, blest, kept, for purposes transcending his own happy being.

Just as the Prayer rises to its transcendent close the world comes up in the accents of the intercession: "that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me"; "that the world may know that Thou didst send Me." So did He forecast, so did He purpose. A conviction was somehow to come over common human thought, conscience, and will, in a measure vast and general, that the Jesus of Bethlehem and of Golgotha was indeed the Sent One of the Eternal Being, of the sovereign Holiness and Love. He should somehow be known to be the absolute manifestation of God, and the one and perfect Way given to man into the peace of pardon and inward rightness, and everlasting union with his Author.

This wonderful result, this spiritual miracle done upon that immense, intractable material, "the world," was full in the Lord's mind as He approached the climax of His intercession. And now we note that He connected the amazing prospect not with some supreme Theophany, some display of divine energies wholly new in kind, but with such a development of Himself in His mortal disciples as should weld them together into a unity profoundly spiritual in its essence, openly practical in its results. That unity was to be conditioned by secrets far deeper than any ecclesiastical amalgamation, for it was to be akin to the union of the Father and the Son. But it was to issue into results so tangible, so visible, so practical, that the common heart of fallen humanity should see that it was magnificently good, and should think, and hunger, and turn.

Once more let me emphasize the note that the phenomenon which should thus evangelize the world was, in the Lord's mind, not ecclesiastical so much as spiritual. It was to be *rather Christianity than Christendom*. That phrase I borrow from a noble and characteristic sermon by C. J. Vaughan, in his volume, *Restful Thoughts for Restless Times*—a sermon on John xvii. 21. Vaughan dwells on the sad fact that Christendom, if we take it to mean the sum of organized Christian communities, is at present certainly far from a convincing argument in favour of the supreme Mission of the Son. At this time rather specially we are constantly met by the cry that "men in the street" see little to win them in "the Churches," with their divisions, and with their scanty spiritual force. But the same cry often goes on to say, with more or less distinctness, that they do see things in the Christ which

arrest and attract. That feeling may be vague enough, and the knowledge that lies in it may be very thin, but it means something. And we may be sure that the human life which is filled and ruled by that Christ, the life of the out-and-out believer in the Crucified and Living One, alive with His love and joy, uplifted by His example, glad to serve, ready to suffer, the embodied illustration of His law and will, is as arresting and attracting to-day as it ever was. The "modern man" will see in it, if God stirs him to any thought over it, a token of the reality and the beauty of its Archetype, and it will prove a magnet to draw him to touch that Archetype for himself. Let such lives be vastly multiplied, and mighty will the magnet be. The more each is like to the Lord, the surer will they all be to coalesce in spiritual nearness, to melt into spiritual unity. And a collective spiritual Christianity will overcome where a too mechanical Christendom has failed. And so the world, on a new scale, will begin to believe, will begin to know. It will recognize that the unique Christ is God manifest. It will discern, in His living representatives, how beautiful is the Christ-filled life; it will understand as never otherwise how dear to a perfect God is that life, and that community of lives; it will believe "that the Father loveth them as He loveth the Son," and it will hunger and thirst to taste their secret.

Such a hope is indeed a thing to kindle the spiritual ambition of every sincere disciple. It is far different from the ideals which seem in our day, too easily, to move with a vague optimism a host of minds which still cling to the dream of a *natural* advance of mankind from bad to good, from good to better. The great War, no doubt, for many thoughtful men, Christian or not, has put a tremendous check upon such expectations. But it has not annulled them, even within the Church. To me, I must confess, many things are said to-day about "the Kingdom of God," its nature, its scope, the means to bring it in with power, which have a strangely naturalistic ring. They leave out of all account, too often, that mystery, "original sin, the corruption of man's heart," which is sternly emphasized in those precise terms in a powerful little poem (*Gold Hair*) not by a Puritan dogmatist but by Robert Browning. It has little to say, too often, about the King of the Kingdom, in His glory of humiliation and exaltation, the glory of the cradle, the cross, and the throne. One would sometimes think that its hope was little higher than a vast and "glorified" social reform, issuing into universal comfort,

culture, and goodwill, in a life whose experiences should have little to do with an eternal glory in prospect, "the better Country, that is the heavenly," the House, the Temple, where "they cannot die any more, but are equal to the angels." Far other is the hope that looks for such an action of the Lord upon the world as shall mean a new and glorious manifestation of His grace in a vastly multiplied host of lives transformed by His Word and Spirit, spent "soberly, righteously, godly, in this present age, looking for that blissful hope."

A question may easily arise here—I know that it does arise over such prospects—does all this mean a genuine universal conversion, before the second Coming of the Son of Man? I dare not here dwell on that problem. All I can say thus in passing, is that on the one hand the forecasts of the Lord and the Apostles seem gravely to negative such a prospect, baldly stated. "When He cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" But on the other hand here is this great Lord's Prayer, and it certainly contemplates *some* vast results on the world, through a spiritual coalescence of His disciples, and it stands apart from any explicit reference to His second Coming. For myself I am willing to leave the riddle, in peace, with Him, while humbly believing that that Coming may not be remote in the future now. May not a great, an almost sudden, revival and development of Christianity in Christians come upon us, perhaps when seemingly least likely? And then may there not follow a vast attention of the world, not without mighty conflicts of light with darkness? And then may not the Coming supervene, to crown and glorify the work done through the disciples, with the manifested grace and omnipotent energy of the Master?

However this shall prove to be, in that plan of "times and seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power," the hour of glory will strike at last. The Intercessor lifts His prayer towards it as He prepares to close this holiest utterance, and to go forthwith to the "amazement," the "bewilderment," of Gethsemane, the sweat of blood, the supreme surrender for us of His pure "natural" desire not to endure the fathomless pain. "Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which Thou gavest Me; for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world." The wonderful phrase rises almost above prayer: "Father, I will." An eternal certainty, sure as the throne

and as the King upon it, speaks through that word. No long presumptuous comment shall be ventured, as we close our meditations with it. We will only, in spirit, kneel, and listen, and worship. It is the voice of a "love that passeth knowledge," for it asks, concerning mortals of the dust, that their Lord may have their company for ever. They are such to Him that to save them is not enough; He must have them, and have them close to Him, and have them so eternally. And here speaks a voice whose surpassing truth and beauty is vitally conditioned by this, that it is the utterance of Incarnate GOD. Only HE, Man with men on earth, can also foretell that the Heaven of heaven for men will be to see HIMSELF, "as He is."

Away with dreams of Heaven which leave out "the Lamb who is the light thereof." Thanks be to God who gives to the transfigured sinner this Heaven in prospect, this open vision, fathomless in its light, and life and love; "for ever with the Lord."

HANDLEY DUNELM.

(Concluded.)

*Note to No. VI : p. 583, lines 7 and 8 from foot.*

Instead of " (as in the case of the second and third Gospels certainly)," read " (the second and third Gospels certainly had not)."

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## STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

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

### XII. CHRISTMAS AND CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE.

*Text.*—"That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God"—(St. Luke i. 35).

"I believe in Jesus Christ, conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary"—(Apostles' Creed).

[Book of the Month: THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF OUR LORD,<sup>1</sup> by Rev.

L. Prestige = P. Other reff., *Virgin Birth*, by Canon Knowling = K. *The Ascent through Christ*, by Dr. Griffith-Jones = J.]

"At every baptism, since about the year 150 at least, the Christian neophyte has made profession of his faith that Christ was born of a virgin" (P. page v).

<sup>1</sup> Published by Robert Scott. 3s. 6d. net. Excellent, modern. Not blind belief but true faith. This Study is scarcely suitable for Christmas Day, but it might well come on the Sunday after.