

ART. II.—A MEDITATION ON THE SO-CALLED DERELICTION OF CHRIST.

(Matt. xxvii. 46.)

IN approaching the deepest of the mysteries of the Passion, the sense of dereliction and desolation which fell upon the Redeemer of mankind in His last agony, we dare not extend or to reduce the limits of those prophetic words in which it found so awful an expression. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" is an utterance of inmost bereavement which only the Spirit which first inspired it can explain in its full significance. From the sublime hymn of the prophet which it opens we can alone give it such an interpretation and application as may present to our minds its true meaning, and save us from those repulsive and partial views of it which were introduced by Calvin and his followers, and which have their extreme illustration in the remarkable work of an anonymous writer, who attempted to demonstrate that our Lord was punished for our sins according to the "lex talionis," a law which He Himself had so authoritatively abrogated;¹ even alleging that He suffered at this awful moment "that degree of anguish which the lost suffer as the punishment of their sins—nay, even a far greater degree of anguish than that which the condemned feel, if we regard its intensity" (p. 439). This would involve despair of God's mercy, which Calvin actually includes in it, for which he is justly rebuked by Pope Benedict XIV. in these words: "This horrible blasphemy destroys itself. For if Christ had despaired He would have sinned grievously, and so have rather inflamed than appeased the wrath of God. Besides this, His last words, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit,' are not words of despair."²

The psalm whose opening words our Lord adopted as the closing words of His life as the "Man of Sorrows" is reasonably believed to be one of those which relate to the revolt of Absalom, and celebrated the return of David to Jerusalem after that unnatural rebellion.³ It is memorable that a greater number of the prophetic passages of the Psalms are grouped round this eventful passage in the life of David than any other. And in this psalm the events of the Passion of Christ rise before us one after the other in such impressive succession that every feature of the earlier history is lost and absorbed in the latter, until the scene of the Crucifixion stands out before

¹ "Anonymi cujusdam Doctissimi Exegesis Passionum Jesu Christi" ("Sylvæ Ducis," 1752).

² "De Festis," p. i., c. 293.

³ Rosenmüller, "Scholia in Ps. xxii."

us clearly and alone. The inward anguish of the soul of David which is opened to us in the words, "They pierced My hands and My feet, I may tell all My bones," fades away before the living truth of Christ. We "see in His hands the print of the nails." The complaint, "They parted My garments among them," which marks the spoliation of the dethroned king, became true in the letter also when "these things the soldiers did." The laughing to scorn, the words of mockery and defiance, "He trusted in God that He would deliver him," partially true in the case of David, have here their real fulfilment. It remained only for Christ Himself to add the last line to the almost completed picture, to "seal up the vision and the prophecy," to say from the very cross, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." And this He did in that touching and suggestive form in which His earlier teachings appealed to the heart and disarmed the prejudices of His hearers, taking the first words of this psalm as among His last words, and drawing on to Himself the application of all the rest. "For why" (asks St. Augustine) "does He say this unless it be in a manner to fix our attention, as though He said, 'This psalm was written of Me'?"¹ It is clear, then, that we must look back upon the words of the psalm itself for the right interpretation of their meaning as uttered by our Lord at this supreme moment.

Now, we observe, first, that this supplication, as it was uttered by David, was rather a prayer that God would not leave him or forsake him in the hour of his extreme necessity than a complaint that He had already forsaken him. Hence in the Septuagint and Vulgate translations words are interposed which give the passage the character of a prayer: "My God, My God, *look upon me*: why hast Thou forsaken me?" And this enlargement of them we have adopted in our Prayer-Book version. In this sense it is rather a lamentation that God had so long delayed an answer to his prayers than a complaint that he was neglected or deserted in his affliction. It was but a varied form of the entreaty made on another occasion, "Haste Thee to help me," "Make no tarrying, O my God." And if we look at the words which follow, "and art so far from the words of my complaint," we see in another form the prayer, "Be not far from me, for trouble is near," in the eleventh verse of the same psalm, and the supplication, "Hide not Thy face when I am in trouble" of the 102nd Psalm. The Psalms are full of similar appeals, and we cannot reasonably doubt that the opening words of the 22nd Psalm are only another instance of them. Hence Cajetan, on this

¹ Aug. on Ps. xxii.

psalm, observes: "The forsaking extends only to the non-preservation from suffering and death. And therefore, for the explanation thereof, he adds, 'And art so far off'—that is, not from me, but from my salvation, from my present deliverance. Where we may observe that he describes the dereliction, not in terms of desertion, but of distance, saying, 'Afar off,' that God may be recognised as standing at a distance, not interposing to save him from suffering and death."

He who said in the hour of His desertion, even by His disciples, "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me;" who addressed His Father at Bethany in the words, "I know that Thou hearest Me always," could never have been deserted in His last agony by the Divine Presence, though a dark cloud of suffering obscured the sense of it for a brief season.

The death of Christ cannot be separated from the life of Christ in its origin, its motive, or its end. The same moral features are conspicuous in the one as in the other, and the same sentence of Divine love is read in both: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He declared that He had entered into the world to bear witness unto the truth, and He died in the world as a martyr to that truth—"a martyrdom" (as St. Methodius, himself a martyr, writes) "crowning every other with its own glory."¹ God, who "rejoiceth not in the death of a sinner," could have no pleasure in the death of the sinless, but rather in the result and the fruits of the willing sacrifice of the Redeemer of mankind. The king in the parable did not send forth his son to the guilty husbandmen in order that he might be slain by them, but that they might repent of their cruelty and return to their allegiance. "What reason can there be," exclaims St. Gregory Nazianzen, "for the belief that the blood of the only-begotten One should be pleasing to the Father, who did not accept the offering up of Isaac by his father, but substituted a ram instead of the human sacrifice? It is evident," he concludes, "that the Father accepted the sacrifice, not because He asked for or needed it, but through the dispensation and in order that, through the assumption of our nature by God, it might become sanctified; that, overcoming the tyrant, He might free us from sin, and bring us to Himself through the mediation of the Son."² Such is the ancient and orthodox doctrine of the Atonement, which stands in strong contrast with that which represents the Father as requiring the death of the Son as a sacrifice to the Divine justice, and an equivalent

¹ Ap. Theodorit., Dial. i.

² Orat. xlii.

for the penalty due to it from a sinful world. This doctrine is more fully laid down by St. Athanasius in the following propositions derived from the most important and authentic of his works:

I. The first cause and motive of the redemption of man was the unchangeable goodness of God, who made provision for the restoration of His work even in the day of its creation.

II. The primary law of the creation had made death the necessary result of the transgression of the commandment and life of its obedience, and not a mere arbitrary decree.

III. The gift of free will rendered death possible, and made moral corruption a necessary result of the breach of the commandment, for the will became corrupt through its choice of evil.

IV. Death was therefore permitted to reign for a season, lest the reign of evil should be eternal; and thus the law of punishment became in effect a law of mercy.¹

V. But the reign of moral corruption required the work of restoration to be twofold—a work of redemption from without and a work of restoration from within.

VI. For the highest acts of repentance were insufficient to remove the guilt or the power of sin, however the mercy of God might remit its penalty.

VII. Man's redemption was effected accordingly by a work of redemption from without (the incarnation of Christ) and a work of restoration from within (the gift of the Holy Ghost as the sanctifier).

VIII. God, if He had so willed, could have forgiven sin without an atonement; but the incarnation was necessary because the flesh of man needed to be renewed by a real contact of the flesh of Christ which the Divine Word and Spirit had sanctified.

IX. By the life and death and resurrection of Christ—

1. Man has been redeemed to God.
2. Sin and corruption have been overcome.
3. God's image in man has been restored.
4. Man's ignorance of God has been removed.²

It will be clearly seen from this summary of the doctrine of Athanasius that that great Father could not have regarded the words of the psalm, as uttered on the cross, in the light of an actual dereliction, or the extreme agony it depicted as a manifestation of the wrath of God. The office of the Father in this

¹ Cf. Naz., Orat. xlii.

² This summary is derived from the "Orat. con. Gentes, de Incarn.," "Verbi Dei. Contra. Arian," "De Passione et Cruce Domini," etc. It was approved by Cardinal Newman, the greatest authority on the subject, who specially added the eighth proposition.

wonderful dispensation of mercy has been well expressed by St. Bernard in the words, "God the Father did not demand the blood of His Son, but accepted it when offered, not thirsting for blood, but for salvation, for there was salvation in the blood." "Nor was it" (as the same writer observes) "the death, but the willingness to die, by death destroying death, working salvation, restoring innocence, triumphing over the principalities and powers of darkness, enriching heaven, gathering together in one all things which are in heaven and which are on earth—it was this which pleased the Father."¹

But while the honour and glory which is due to the eternal Father precludes us from taking a view of the Passion which would render it rather a mystery of material terror than of moral beauty, of inexorable justice than of pardoning mercy, the honour and glory of the Son compel us to acknowledge His death and Passion as in the highest sense an atoning sacrifice, a sin-offering and a peace-offering for the reconciliation of the world to God. The declaration, "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son," is completed and perfected in the correlative one, "Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God." In this voluntary obedience of Christ lies all the moral glory of His submission to death. In His "coming to do the will of His Father" the prophet foreshowed the perfection of His work. In this work, and above all in its final triumphs, the presence of the Father could never forsake Him. Clouded it indeed was by the intensity of His sufferings, both mental and bodily, overwhelmed by the sense of an outward loneliness, which was deepened by the consciousness that the travail of His soul had been for a season at least without fruit, made yet more acute by the cruel persecutions which even grew bitterer as the bitterness of His sorrows increased, and with the sense of the nearness of His Father failing Him, He might well, therefore, utter the entreaty, "My God, My God, look upon Me." The lamentation of the prophet over the ruined city of God might well describe the state of the Redeemer at this moment of unspeakable anguish, "For these things I weep; mine eye runneth down with water; because the Comforter which should relieve my soul is far from me; my children are desolate because the enemy prevailed." Sin had indeed prevailed, and had left his children desolate. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, and the night of the greatest desolation dawned in the glorious victory of the finished sacrifice. And this thought leads us on to another and a more practical view of the awful and awakening words we are con-

¹ "Tract. de Error," Abailardi, c. viii. c—g.

sidering. Many of their earliest and best interpreters regarded them not only as bearing upon the personal sufferings of the Redeemer, but also, and even more directly, on the misery and destitution of mankind as yet unredeemed to God.

"Many of Christ's words and works," observes Nicetas in his commentary on Nazianzene, "are applicable not to Himself, but to us; His acts, as, for instance, His baptism itself; His words, as those 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'" "Our Lord Jesus Christ," wrote St. Leo the Great, "transforming Himself into the members of His body, sends forth that word which He had before uttered in the psalm, in the sufferings of the cross, in the name of His redeemed people, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' This voice is a doctrine and not a complaint. For since Christ could never be forsaken in that nature from which He could never be separated, He asks this in behalf of us, who are liable to fear and infirmity."¹ A later commentator writes in a like sense, "The Head is pleading the cause of the body, and the anxious Physician so sympathizes with His sick ones that He disdains not to be in part infirm as they are."²

St. Jerome exclaims, "Here nature speaks, as deserted in Adam when he transgressed the commandments."³

But the clearest and fullest view of our Lord's words in this extended sense is to be found in the statement of St. Cyril of Alexandria in the acts of the Council of Ephesus: "What does our Lord mean in that He saith, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' We affirm Him to mean this. When our first parent, Adam, had violated the commandment he had received, and neglected the divine law, man's nature became, in a certain sense forsaken and subject to death. And when the only-begotten One came to restore to incorruption that which had fallen, and having taken the seed of Abraham, became like unto His brethren—then together with that ancient curse and the death it brought with it, it behoved Him to submit to that desertion which human nature had experienced from that day. Having been placed till now in the number of the forsaken, inasmuch as, like ourselves, He partook of flesh and blood, He exclaimed, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' a voice which put an end to that dereliction which had befallen us, and rendered the Father through Himself propitious to us."⁴

We are carried back in this suggestive passage to the desertion of our Lord's earlier life when He cast in His lot with the

¹ Serm. xvi., "De Passione Domini."

² "Arnold. "Carnot. de vii. verbis Domini."

³ In Ps. xxi.

⁴ "De Rectâ in Deo fide, ad Reginas, Acta Concil. Ephes. ed. Peltani, Ingolst.," 1576, p. 168.

forsaken, to the day when "His own received Him not," and "neither did His brethren believe on Him," when He stood alone in the temple, alone in the wilderness, alone on the Mount; when the faithless multitude dropped off from Him in bitter foretaste of that day of final desertion, when even His disciples forsook Him and fled; when He was making the life-long preparation for that hour of final dereliction when the comforts of the Divine Presence were clouded; when there was the hiding of the power of God and a darkening of the light of life; when the night of His affliction was breaking into the day of the resurrection from the darkness of the three hours of agony, and the prophecy was approaching its fulfilment, "Arise, shine, for Thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." In the revelation of that exceeding glory the desertion of man's nature passed away for ever. The Scripture was fulfilled which said "Thou shalt no more be called Forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be termed desolate." For from the hour of this utterance from the Cross the loneliest and lowliest sorrower who lifts his prayer to Christ, has never been constrained to exclaim "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Truly then might our Lord have said of this word as of the voice from heaven which confirmed His mission and proclaimed its glory—"This voice came not for My sake, but for yours." All His sufferings were for our sake. "The pains of the wounds were His, but ours the benefit. The sufferings of His death were His, but ours the mercy. The stripes on His back were His, but the balm that issued from them ours. The thorns on His head were His, but the crown is ours. The corn is not grinded, nor baked nor broken for itself; the grape is not bruised nor pressed for itself. All is ours, all is for our sake. In the Cross of Christ we have the supply of every need. If we want power we have the power of His Cross; if victory, the victory of the Cross; if peace, the peace of the Cross; if wisdom, the wisdom of the Cross. Thus is Christ crucified a treasure to His Church, full of all-sufficient provision both for its necessity and delight."¹ But while thus we vindicate the love of God, the Father in Christ, His "unspeakable gift," we must be scrupulously careful on the other side not to detract from the priceless value of the death of Christ as the one sacrifice for the propitiation of our sins. In these days of doubt and coldness, when the death of Christ is rather regarded as an instance of patient suffering than as an offering for the expiation of sin, rather as a sacrifice of alliance than of atonement, we cannot be too anxious to

¹ Bishop Reynold's "Meditations on the Sacrament," pp. 25, 33, ed. Lond., 1639.

keep in view the teaching of the Last Supper, which the deniers of a propitiatory sacrifice have been unable to explain away or even to qualify. Strauss himself has been forced to confess that in the institution of the Last Supper, "the idea of a sacrifice of alliance becomes that of an expiatory sacrifice; that the words 'for the remission of sins' and 'for you and for all mankind' pass beyond the simple sacrifice of alliance, and make it to become a sacrifice of expiation."¹ Christ came not only to teach, but to restore; not only to live as an example, but to die as a sacrifice. "Far better were it to deny the death of Christ than to deny the power of that death; better to say that He never perished than that He perished in vain. For if His blood be shed in vain, vain also are our tears and vain our hopes; in vain we drink that fruitless blood which we fondly once believed to be the ransom of the sins of the world."²

Surely they who exclaimed "This man calleth for Elias" knew as much of the hidden meaning of this exceeding bitter cry as those do who would reduce it to a value so little worthy of the great end for which Christ came into the world. These men, in their ignorance of Hebrew (for they were probably Roman soldiers or Greeks who were watching at the foot of the Cross), might well be excused an ignorance which in their case was natural and almost inevitable. But we may well ask of those who claim the Christian name, Can it be possible that all that the great Head of our profession has done for us is but to add another instance to the many examples of patient suffering, of persecuted innocence, of a testimony to the truth carried on even to a cruel martyrdom? Can it be that He lived and died only "to point a moral and adorn a tale"? Is there nothing deep enough in our own nature and our own necessities to teach us the shallowness of such a thought? Surely there is not a single yearning of our hearts, not a single need of our nature, not a single sympathy of our race, that can find satisfaction in a doctrine which leaves our unredeemed and ruined nature merely in the prospect of an inimitable example, and deprives us of the presence of an almighty Redeemer—a Saviour "speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." Precious to us in the hour of life and in the day of labour will be the inspiring thought of Christ, as "loving us and giving Himself for us," as "bowing down His kingly thorn-crowned head on the Cross in bitter expiation of our sins."³ And even more precious will it be to us in that day when every earthly treasure shall become as dross, and every

¹ "Leben Jesu," tom. ii., c. i., sect. cix.

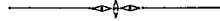
² Vossii, "Respon. Ravensperger, de Libro Grotii, de Satisf. Christi."

³ Hofacker, Serm.

earthly hope shall fail; when the memories of the past shall fade before the fainting and clouded spirit; when the enfeebled mind shall lose its grasp of the things of sight and sense; when our days shall seem, as we look back upon them, "rather to be a confusion than a life,"¹ while the future is opening upon us like the morning spread upon the mountains in coldness and gloom. In that hour (and it is an hour which must come to all) the great truth of the atoning sacrifice and its deep reality will rise before us in all its intensity of comfort, in all its unspeakable grandeur. It will be to us "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," as the "light shining on unto the perfect day." Then will the loneliness of Christ be the breaking up of our solitude; His mourning will be our comfort, His thirst our supply, His weakness our strength; and that simple and sufficient prayer which thousands of devoted Christians have in every age put forth as their last entreaty, will find utterance in our hearts even if it dies voiceless on our lips:

"Lord Jesus Christ, put Thou Thy Passion and Cross and death between Thy judgment and my soul."

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ART. III.—NOTES ON EARLY CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS.

PART II.

IN the valuable tractate lately discovered, called the "Teaching of the Apostles," and dating about 120 A.D., are preserved some of the early sacramental prayers of the Christians.² The work probably represents the custom of the Ebionites, or "poor" Christians of Pella and Kaukaba, in Bashan,³ who claimed to a late date that descendants of the brothers of Christ lived among them. They were a very Judaizing sect, who received only the Gospel of Matthew, and who continued to circumcise down to the fourth century, and turned to Jerusalem in prayer as the Holy City. The prayer of the Cup was

¹ S. Laur, Justiniani, Opp.

² See Professor Harnack's paper, *Contemporary Review*, August, 1886, as to date.

³ The site of Kaukabah, near Ashteroth Karnaim, has only recently been found. See Eusebius, H.E., I., vii. 15. Some of the inscriptions found on osteophagi of the second, third, and fourth centuries on Mount Olivet seem to have been those of native Christians—probably Ebionites. See "Syrian Stone-Lore," pp. 259, 260. The cross occurs in some instances, but they are undated.