

Abraham's bosom, while a placid smile lingered upon his countenance. Thus, "a beloved brother, and faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord," passed from the church militant to fellowship with the church triumphant. He died in Guernsey, on Tuesday, May 26th, 1863, in the forty-sixth year of his age, and the twenty-third of his ministry.

Among other public testimonies to his character and attainments is the following, which appeared in one of the journals of the island:—

"Mr. Mollard was a scholar. A considerable amount of theological knowledge and Biblical erudition was manifest in the composition of his sermons. As a Christian, Mr. Mollard was an exemplary character, of a cordial and affable disposition and great humility. Consistent, faithful, and pious, through life, his declining years were cheered with a bright hope of endless bliss, and in triumph he passed into eternity. 'Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.'"

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH.*

A SERMON PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF THE WESLEYAN-METHODIST CHAPEL, AINSDALE, NEAR SOUTHPORT, ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 6TH, 1866.

BY THE REV. W. B. POPE.

"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. xviii. 20.)

THE building which we now dedicate to the service of God owes its origin to this word of Christ; it is one of innumerable houses of prayer that are overspreading the world in virtue of this original charter of Christian assembly and worship. For the promise here uttered by the Redeemer in the midst of His apostles assumes, when interpreted by the light of the future, the force of an absolute decree, enjoining the new worship of the church which He was about to found, and pronouncing upon it prospectively an endless benediction.

The *new* worship: for it silently intimates that the old is ready to vanish away. The temple where the name of Jehovah had been enshrined is already regarded as closed. Another temple, not made with hands, was to be reared of regenerated souls, the building and worshippers being one: where was to be enshrined another Name, *which is not another*, but only a new manifestation of the same Triune

* One or two allusions in the following pages make it necessary to mention that this chapel—built in a neglected district, and large enough to include its entire population—is the free gift of Mr. James Fishwick Stead of Southport.

God who had been worshipped from the beginning. In this better sanctuary no veil was to interpose between the people and their God: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

The new *worship*: for this ordinance does not abolish, but enjoins, the formal assembling of the future church. The Name is still recorded in a *place* chosen, and of that place the ancient promise holds good: "*There* I will meet you and bless you." The congregation of the people is as imperative under the new as under the old economy; the worship of God and the edification of man were to lose nothing in the transfer; the sacrificial service was still to go on, though with a richer and deeper meaning; and whatever change was to be introduced should be only and infinite gain: "There am I in the midst of them."

Then let us reverently consider this primitive charter of Christian worship, which prescribes the gathering of the people unto the name of Jesus, and promises His abiding presence in their midst.

I. The centre of the Christian assembly is the person of the Redeemer: they meet *in* His name, to avow and confirm their common faith in Him; they worship *through* His name, as the sole Mediator of their religious services; they gather *around* His name, as the Head of a confession that must win the world.

1. The Christian community is a company of persons who are one in the common bond of faith in the name of Jesus. According to the Scriptural idea of Christian fellowship, that faith is the trust of penitent souls in the only name given under heaven whereby men may be saved. It is a living faith, inwrought by the Holy Ghost, that unites them to Christ as a living Head, and makes them partakers of His pardoning and regenerating grace. Receiving individually the seal of their acceptance in the Beloved, of their separation from the world, and of their admission into the family of God, they unite collectively to avow their faith before men. In this they obey the injunction of their Master, who builds His church on the confession of His Name by living witnesses of its power: ordaining that baptism should be the primary seal of that confession, the sacramental communion its occasional and most solemn confirmation, and all the meetings of believers its habitual expression. Faith in His Name is the living bond of a living church.

This, brethren, is the fundamental principle and precious secret of Christian fellowship; to this it behoves us continually, and especially on such occasions as this, to revert. It is true that the reality around us does not seem to accord with this ideal. The congregations that assemble in the name of Jesus are not composed of true believers alone. Multitudes baptized in their infancy have not entered into their Christian privileges, though they have not renounced the Christian name.

Multitudes have failed to redeem the pledges of their first devotion ; and utter the holy Name with unholy lips and from backsliding hearts. Multitudes are found in the Christian assemblies to whom the religion of Christ has never been more than an external form. Many there are, too, who are only learning the way of faith, and join in Christian worship as probationers for its full assurance and final experience. But, with all these deductions, the truth remains, that the eternal theory of Christian fellowship—the soul of all church-communication—is the joyful avowal of the common salvation through faith in the common Name which every believer makes his own in the confidence of appropriating trust. Let all who shall ever join in the services of this house which Christ “has chosen to put His name there,” bear this in mind, that He will be in the midst only of those who are or desire to be spiritual believers in His Gospel ; and that none of the blessings of which His presence is the pledge can be obtained on any other terms than a living and saving faith.

2. But the Christian assembly is an assembly of worshippers, who present their worship *through* the one name of Jesus, as the Mediator between God and men. As the Mediator in heaven, He renders all human service acceptable ; as the Mediator on earth, He orders all the details of that service according to His own will.

(1.) The full meaning of the word “in My name” was not disclosed when the promise was first given. The disciples knew not as yet the mystery of the Lord’s highpriestly office ; they knew not, until He had finished His work of atonement, that access to heaven was to be opened by His intercession. For this great truth He gradually prepared their minds. Here first He intimated to them that His name would be the foundation of Christian worship. And from this time forward until His departure, He gave them more and more plainly to understand that their prayers should be heard and answered for His sake and through His authority. But it was not until the heavens had received Him, and His intercessory office began at the right hand of the Father, that they fully knew the virtue of His all-prevalent name as the Mediator between God and men.

It is the indispensable law of Christian worship that it be offered through the name of Jesus. Christianity has brought to light the mystery hid from ages and generations, that only through a Mediator, presenting an atoning sacrifice, is the Divine Being accessible to man. As it declared to the heathen that *unknown God* to whom their altars were ignorantly dedicated, so it declared to the Jews that *unknown Mediator* through whom they ignorantly worshipped. It is the glory of the Christian congregation to approach a revealed God through a revealed Intercessor ; we know not only *whom we worship*, but also *through whom we worship Him*. These our visible houses of prayer are but the outer and as yet distant courts of a great temple, over which

a High Priest presides, who for ever receives our unworthy offerings of prayer and praise, and secures their acceptance with our Father in heaven. The worship which consecrates this place, is offered in the name of Jesus; and through all time to come no utterance of devotion will ever be heard within these walls that shall not pay its tribute to that name, and be well pleasing through its virtue.

(2.) The mediatorship of Christ is not confined to the heavenly places. He is the Master of our assemblies on earth also; and, as such, regulates and orders all our acceptable worship. As Moses, the lesser mediator in the typical house, was faithful in the administration of its religious offices, so Christ, the greater Mediator, is faithful in the administration of the service of His living house, the church. He is present with us in spirit,—not, as St. Paul, in imagination, but by the direct agency of His own Holy Spirit,—directing the ordinances of our worship according to the pattern which He has Himself shown us in His word.

We may regard this mediatorial regulation of the Christian service under three aspects.

First, He has abolished and withdrawn from His house of prayer that which in the "earthly sanctuary" was typical, temporary, provisional. His own accomplished sacrifice once offered, and never to be repeated, has rendered needless the altar, the priesthood, the shedding of blood, and the endless variety of ceremonial oblation. "In My Name" displaces all, and reduces to pure and blessed simplicity the communion between God and man; substituting the "heavenly things themselves" for the earthly "patterns of the things in the heavens." And with the fading away of the typical service, the house in which it was offered has vanished also; left desolate by the departure of the true Shekinah, it was then laid utterly waste; but is now reproduced in countless houses of Christian prayer, wherein "two or three are gathered together," in every part of the earth.

Secondly, and more particularly, our Lord has given positive institutes of worship, which are as binding on His people as the abolished ceremonies of the temple were upon the Jews. There are still "ordinances of Divine service," though there is no longer a "worldly sanctuary." He has provided for the decent maintenance of His worship by the appointment of a Christian ministry and pastorate, chosen, qualified, and continued in never-ending succession by the Holy Spirit. He has commanded the assembling of Christians together for the worship of the Triune God in hymns and spiritual songs; for the offering of prayers, supplications, intercessions, and thanksgivings; for the celebration of the Eucharist; for hearing His holy word read and expounded; and for all purposes generally of religious devotion and charity. He has re-consecrated the ancient Sabbath for the commemoration of the finished work; hallowing it not so much by express enactment as by the grace of His own presence and personal bene-

diction upon it, when He rose from the dead. And it was in the prospect of all these observances in the future of His church, when the withdrawal of His bodily presence should give form to the service of faith, that He uttered these words, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name."

Let us be on our guard, brethren, against two opposite errors that trouble our own times: the error, on the one hand, of too lightly esteeming the privileges of Christian fellowship and public worship; and the error, on the other hand, of making religion consist mainly in its due ceremonial observance. Against both, the words of this original injunction and promise, when rightly considered, are an effectual safeguard.

This saying of our Lord, as interpreted by the Holy Ghost in the history of the early church, assumes that the religious life of Christians is a fellowship that must have its outward expression. It altogether disavows the notion, always more or less prevalent, that union with the visible body of Christ's followers is comparatively of little moment. The whole tenour of the New Testament runs contrary to this. It is true that religion is a personal matter; and that our Saviour, in His first precept concerning prayer, bids us enter our closet and pray to the Father who seeth in secret. In that silent and hidden sanctuary of our own hearts—where the solitary worshipper is alone with his God—He would have us learn the first lesson of our devotion, and there keep up its constant strength. But He does not command us to tarry there; He never teaches that the individual worshipper is to find his way to the general assembly in heaven through a path of solitary and separate devotion. Even in that earliest injunction He put the "Our Father" into His disciples' lips; and His latest ordinances regard them as a community united by the strongest bond that can bind the hearts of men, always rejoicing in each other's fellowship, and separating daily only to meet again.

But the spirit of our Lord's words is equally repugnant to an opposite extreme,—that of those who exaggerate the mystery of Christian communion, practically limiting the presence of Christ, and the saving influence of His presence, to certain assemblies and ordinances of an exclusive church. The name of the one only Mediator is the bond of fellowship everywhere; and, where that name is truly invoked, according to the simple terms of communion that He in His supreme authority has established, there He "receives the congregation." It is not an altar, it is not a priesthood, transmitted in the order of their course from generation to generation, it is not a sacrificial ritual, or any ritual at all, that constitutes the guarantee of His acceptance of the assembly, but the presence of His Name, and Person, and Spirit. Nor is this sanctifying grace limited to the place which He "chooses to put His name there:" His mediatorial presence is everywhere with His people whose relation to Him does not absolutely depend upon their visible

gathering to Him. Those who assemble *unto* His name bring the virtue of their grace with them, and carry it with them wherever they go. They meet publicly in the name that is privately precious to each. Let us, then, brethren, see to it that we do not confine our religion to the public ordinances of Christ's church.

Thirdly, the Mediator of our Christian assembly has been pleased to commit much of the order and detail of the public service, as it regards its place, time, and circumstance, to the discretion of His people. Provided His few positive enactments and fixed institutions are duly honoured, He leaves the rest to the free spirit of our Christian devotion. While He accepts the house dedicated to His name, He is not limited to the courts of any building made with hands. "*Where two or three are gathered together in His name, there am I,*" is a pledge that He does not confine Himself to the great congregation, assembled in their fullest number and for their most complete service, but graciously condescends to shed the glory and grace of His presence upon the little companies of His servants who "*speak often one to another,*" for common edification and common prayer, in divers places and at occasional times. While all things are done "*decently and in order,*" He accepts everywhere and at all times our service. If we approve ourselves jealous of the honour of His holy day, His word and sacrament, and His own appointed ordinances, He will honour our subordinate appointments of time and place for observing these ordinances. "*Where two or three,*" is a word of blessed latitude: it pledges its promise to every order of our gatherings, from the smallest family circle, through all the variety of our social meetings, up to the church united around the word and table of the Lord.

3. To complete our view of the Christian assembly we must regard it as meeting *around* the name of Jesus as the Head of a witnessing church, whose office it is to win the whole earth to His allegiance. This gives a distinguishing character to the congregation of Christ's worshippers. It never meets without an ulterior reference to the spread of His kingdom: wherever the two or three are gathered together to avow their own faith in Christ, and to solemnize their worship through His mediation, their purpose is also to advance the honour of the name of Jesus by adding to their own number and the number of those who profess that name.

Hence every Christian assembly is a company of Christ's servants meeting to renew their pledges of loyalty and devotion to His sacred cause. They are worshippers in the name of Jesus, who are under the most solemn vows to do their utmost to bring others to accept His mediation. Their worship has not attained its end in itself: this they wait for in heaven, where alone pledges of active service will be lost in eternal adoration. In this world they have a religion which they must spread as well as enjoy. And it is the very law of the Chris-

tian assembly around the name of Jesus that it exists to diffuse that name. Every congregation, even the smallest, has a silent ambition to win the world; and never breaks up without new vows of consecration to the King in Zion, who is to be the accepted Lord of all the earth.

Hence the prominence given in our assemblies to the preaching of the Gospel of salvation. There are not many meetings of Christ's people into which all men are not allowed and even invited to enter. Some there are, indeed, which are in their very nature limited to those who are by their profession the living heart of the church; and it would be an unmixed evil, were the disciples of Jesus not to have a *garden enclosed* and a *fountain sealed*. But to the general assemblies of the church all are admitted, and no test, either of faith or of character, is applied. This by many is counted an evil, and we have lately heard it asserted to be the bane of Christian worship. But our defence is drawn from the unlimited charity of the Gospel, and the imperative obligations of Christian devotion. Every assembly has the conversion of all its members at heart; and surely it is not without the full sanction of Christ when His word of salvation is preached in the midst of it to those who are still unsaved. Pure worship of God, with simple exposition of His mind and will to regenerate hearts, is a beautiful ideal; but it is an ideal that the state of mankind will only to a limited extent admit. If Christ is in the midst of His people, His people, and Christ with them, is in the midst of a perishing world.

And there are assemblies of Christians around the name of Jesus in which the personal profession, and the offering of religious worship are entirely subordinate to that ultimate end,—the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom upon earth. How many are the schemes of Christian charity and benevolence to the bodies and souls of men, to the miserable at home and the heathen abroad, in furtherance of which Christians gather together! And every such meeting, whether on a smaller or a larger scale, whether taking the form of a great congregation or of a committee for counsel and deliberation, is no less an assembly *in the name of Jesus* than those which professedly meet for Christian worship. Of this we may be well assured, that, when our Saviour uttered the saying of our text, He meant not to restrict His promise to meetings held for express communion with Himself: He contemplated in the glorious future of Christian activity all the innumerable enterprises in which His name should enlist the charities of His people. We cannot be too careful to avoid entertaining an opposite illusion. We never are more truly gathered around Him,—the eternal Source of charity to man,—never are we more surely met in His name, never are we more secure of His presence and sanction in the midst of us, than when we meet to consult rather for His interests than our own, rather to promote the good of others than to seek our own blessing.

We may extend this application still further. There is no meeting of the Christian church for any purpose connected with its discipline, regulation, and prosperous fellowship that is not an assembly in the name of Jesus. The obligation to do all in that name rests upon the community as well as upon the individual. Our Saviour speaks of His disciples as gathered in His name to deal with an offending brother; and St. Paul represents the church as assembled "in the name of Jesus," to cast out an impenitent Christian. There is no purpose of administration, in all its wide variety, and down to its most common detail, that has not the same dread sanction. And as this truth gives dignity to all the meetings, more public and more private of the Christian church, so it imposes on us the duty of attending them in the spirit of reverent devotion and zeal. Let us ever remember, brethren, on the numberless occasions on which our ecclesiastical polity requires us to assemble in the service of the church, that its Divine Head is always present by His Spirit, disdaining no object, however seemingly trivial, which unites two or three of His disciples in His name.

To sum up what has hitherto been said. We take possession this day of a house which is from this time forward to be sacred to the fellowship of the Christian Society of this place; where they will meet, according to the Redeemer's laws, and the usages of the people called Methodists, to avow, from time to time, their faith in Jesus, the Saviour of all men, but especially of them that believe; where they will offer, through the one Mediator, their never-ceasing service of prayer and praise, surrounding His table, hearing His word, and worshipping the God of their fathers; where they will gather around the throne of their Master, to pledge themselves to His service, and to obtain strength for the good works they will do in His name. We join you, brethren, in this your first gathering in a place built by one who loves your Master and his. When we leave it to you, see that you honour it as the home and centre of your religious life. Let your feet be familiar with its gates, and count it your happiness as well as your duty to be present with the congregation which shall worship in it. So will you have your part in that great blessing, which is pledged in the words to which we now turn: *There am I in the midst of them.*

II. The Presence of Christ in the assemblies of His people for ever is here for the first time promised; and the language of the promise is so simple in its sublimity, that we can hardly miss its full depth of meaning. "*I am in the midst,*" is the very voice of God throughout the Old-Testament Scriptures; and, as used by our Saviour here, it is the assurance of nothing less than a Divine Presence in the church. It is also the promise of the incarnate Jesus, that He Himself in His human sympathy and mediatorial

offices would ever continue among His disciples, even when removed from their sight. And when He says "In the midst" He teaches us to expect the equal effusion of His grace upon all who surround Him.

1. Every word in this first Christian promise declares that He who speaks is God. Jehovah, the eternal *I Am*, chose formerly a place, to put His *name* there; and always was pleased to declare that He dwelt *in the midst* of His people. From the first revelation of that awful name by Moses, through the whole range of the ancient Scriptures, down to Zephaniah's last word, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty," these are the sacred phrases that declared the union between God and His people. The Redeemer would never have used that long consecrated and inviolable language, had He been less than Divine: *It is the voice of a God, and not of a man. I am* in the midst, not, *I will be*, or, *I will come*; but, in the awful significance of the term that knows no change, *I am*. Hence, our Lord declares, rather than promises, an abiding and necessary presence among His people, as that of God dwelling in His new temple; the eternal Son, in the unity of the Father, and of the Holy Ghost, inhabiting, sanctifying, and glorifying the new house of His glory, the Christian church.

In this place Christ will be for ever honoured as God; here He will never be known "after the flesh." The worshippers who shall fill these courts will honour the Mediator through whom they worship as Himself the object of their worship. Though the Christian order of their service will be presented to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Ghost, they will never scruple to *call upon* the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; nor deem that they give the glory of God to another, when they honour the Son as they honour the Father, remembering who hath said, *My Name is in Him*. We this day take possession for ourselves, as the worshippers of Jesus, and dedicate to Christ our God, the Revealer and the Representative of the Holy Trinity, a house of prayer in which the three Persons of the Triune name shall be worshipped and magnified with an equal adoration for ever.

Let this truth teach us, brethren, the unspeakable sanctity of our assemblies in this house. The place whereon we stand is holy ground; not because it is a sacred building, but because of the awful Presence in it. Let the thought that you are gathering around the invisible Person of your God made man inspire your hearts with reverence whenever you enter these gates, and for whatsoever purpose of devotion you enter. Strive to cultivate the spirit of adoration until it become a law. There is much danger of our forgetting this; partly, because His presence is invisible, and there are no symbols in our simple worship to present it to our minds; and partly because of our habitual familiarity with holy services, in which the Sacred Name is ever on our lips. We are, perhaps, justly chargeable, as a people, with

irreverence, or, rather, with lack of reverence, in our ordinary assemblies. Let it be your study to escape this reproach of man, and to avoid this dishonour to God, by cultivating in all your assemblies a spirit of decorous solemnity. This does not require a magnificent ritual of symbols, nor any lights to indicate the sacramental and localized presence of our Lord; it needs only the habitual act of faith in the blessed words, *I am in the midst*.

2. While we assert the Divine prerogative of our Lord, as the eternal *I Am*, in His temple, we must not forget that He speaks as Jesus of Nazareth, who promises to be in the midst of the congregation of those whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren. The angel-ministers of the Ascension told the disciples that the same Jesus should be seen by them returning, as they had seen Him go into the heavens. But their Master had already spoken a better word than that: He had given them the assurance that He would not leave them comfortless, but come unto them, not less really and actually Himself than if they beheld Him with their eyes. This He spake of the Spirit, through whose agency, as the Holy Ghost of the mediatorial dispensation, He continues all His offices in the midst of His people. His glorified human nature is in heaven, awaiting a set time to return: till then, it is by the influence of the Third Person of the Trinity that He manifests Himself to believers. It was thus that the Lord afterwards explained the words of His first promise.

But that earlier promise would never have been left on record if it had not been the Saviour's purpose to encourage in our hearts the feeling that we have ever in our midst the invisible God-man, whose humanity brings God near to us, and is so essential to our human hearts. We must not let the later explanation take from us the letter of the original text. We must not doubt, but steadfastly believe, that *the same Jesus*, whose presence as a Teacher, as a Saviour, and as a Master, was the joy of the disciples before His ascension, is by His Spirit still present, teaching us that fuller truth which He reserved from them, conferring that more entire salvation which His death alone brought in, and exercising that more absolute authority which He attained in His resurrection. St. Paul's interpretation of the ancient Psalm belongs to the Pentecostal church, and not alone to the earlier days: "He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee." Here the two great mediatorial offices are declared to be still fulfilled by Jesus in the midst of His church. He is, on the one hand, the Revealer of God unto us; declaring His name as the God of mercy through the atonement, preaching by His word and through His servants the terms of the common salvation, imparting those blessings to those who repent and believe the Gospel of the grace of God, and unfolding the mysteries

of the Father's will to the regenerate minds of His brethren. All this He does as the ever-present Prophet-King of the Christian church, gathered around His Person to hear the oracles of heaven. On the other hand, He is the representative of His brethren's worship; leading their prayers and devotions, giving virtue and the prerogative of sure acceptance to their supplications, making their songs, as it were, His own, and thus presenting their service in His own name to the Father. All this He does as the ever-present Priest-King of the Christian Church, gathered around His Person to send up to heaven the worship of earth. The incarnate Mediator is not shut up in the heavens, though the heavens have received Him. We do not wait until "the coming of our Lord" for our "gathering together unto Him." "Where two or three are met in My name, *there am I in the midst of them.*"

Let it be our study, brethren, in our assemblies for Christian worship, reverently to realize the presence of Jesus, the Son of Man. Our imagination need not be too busy in depicting any human form;—like the ancient worshippers, "we have seen no manner of similitude" of our heavenly Master;—but let our faith be strong in the actual nearness of Him "whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Let us cherish the thought that when we enter these gates we "are come to Jesus," and draw nearer than we are wont to Him; that when we hear His word, it is spoken to us by Himself; that when we speak often one to another concerning His goodness, He hearkens and hears; that He is near in all His human sympathy to minister His grace to our infirmity; that His hand is present to give us the bread and the wine, and to bless us with every variety of benediction. In all this we derogate not from the dignity of the Holy Ghost, whose glory it is in the Christian dispensation to "take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us." "He shall glorify Me," was our Lord's prophecy and promise: while the Father glorifies His incarnate Son in heaven, the Spirit of Jesus glorifies Him on earth in the midst of His brethren.

3. There is yet one more word in this original promise upon which we may profitably linger: "There am I *in the midst* of them." This gives us no new or additional meaning in our Saviour's declaration, but it suggests the most gracious reflections on the Redeemer's nearness to us, on the diffusiveness of His grace in our religious meetings, and on the freedom with which each is admitted to his own portion in that grace.

The veil is done away in Christ. God was anciently in the midst of His people: symbolically and really near to them, whithersoever they went, while the ark of His covenant was in their possession. The earlier lawgiver could touchingly appeal to that fact as the

strongest argument for their gratitude and devotion : what people hath God so near unto them ? But God in Christ is in the midst of us in a sense in which God behind the dense curtain was not in the midst of Israel. It is true He is still hidden from our sight, but to our faith the veil is already done away. Between us and Him there intervenes no priestly mediator; nor does He declare His presence, as in former times, at fixed intervals and amidst dread solemnities, to one in behalf of all. He does not require that we regard Him as a far-distant Mediator, interceding for us within the veil, while we await in trembling uncertainty the issue of our prayers. He makes the Holiest of all accessible to the faith of His people ; and, by being Himself in our midst, brings our lower and unworthy assembly into direct communion with the very court of heaven. Jacob's night is turned into day ; and the antitype of Jacob's ladder, on which the angels of God ascended and descended, is our Saviour Christ, uniting heaven and earth by His presence in the midst of His praying saints.

It speaks also of a grace diffusive. Those closing strains of the Old Testament belonged rather to the new than the old economy : " The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty ; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy ;...He will joy over thee with singing." Salvation is shed forth from the presence of Christ upon all who reject not His influence. That virtue which went forth from Him when the crowds surrounded Him, and which healed them all, was typical of that diffusive grace which still and for ever radiates from His sacred Person. None enter the Christian assembly without being more or less sensible of its influence, although many learn to resist its mysterious appeals to their heart. It touches and moves upon all ; but it enters, and enlightens, and comforts, and saves those whose souls rejoice to give it access. They feel His presence as the power of a present blessing ; and hence a *present blessing* becomes the watchword of their meetings : a word mocked by the profane, pitied as enthusiasm by the sober ceremonialist, condemned as presumption by the too diffident worshipper to whom the Incarnate Elder Brother of the Church is no other than the union of a *jealous God* and an *austere man*, but inexpressibly precious to the simple believers in the very promise of Christ. They know that He is in the midst, by tokens of Divine influence that could proceed only from Himself. To them His own word is fulfilled, for He *manifests Himself* unto them. The elevating, inspiring effect of His word assures them that it is He who speaks it to their hearts ; the consciousness of renewed pardon, giving them rest from all their doubts, tells them that He forgives their sins ; consolation for their sorrow, deliverance from their besetments, direction in their difficulties, revival for their languor, and ever new inspirations of love, and hope, and joy, all conspire to give full assurance of a

Presence to their faith even better than would be a Presence to their sight; and they never come to the "gathering of His people unto Him," in simple, childlike reliance on the truth of His promise to be in the midst, without being constrained, like the converted worshipper of St. Paul, to confess that God is in the midst, or, like St. John on that morning of the resurrection season, to say to their own hearts, *It is the Lord.*

Lastly, the word suggests the individual privileges of believers as sharing a common blessing. Our Lord in the midst of His people is the "same Lord unto all who call upon Him:" in the most affecting fulness of its meaning, the common Lord of a common salvation. What the sun and the rain of God's providence are to His creatures as such,—impartial in their distribution of good,—the Mediator of God's grace is to His saved people. He is in the midst, alike accessible to all, equally accessible to each. He is the Centre, from whom flows out grace to the most distant, and to whom the most distant may, if he will, come near. It is true that He still uses instruments in the impartation of His blessing: He still "gives to the disciples, that they may give to the multitude." But the blessing itself is in no hands but His own; and He distributes it to each severally as He will. He wills that every one shall come to Him, and shall have according to his faith. Come, then, now, fellow-Christian, and come always, for your own portion; not fearing that any will step in before you, intercept the Lord from your eyes, or be counted worthier than yourself. Remember always your personal, inalienable privilege to be as near to Christ as any other believer, to be as near to Him as it is your *desire* to be. For every one who comes to the Lord with Simon Peter's individual confession of faith and love, *Thou art the Christ*, shall hear Simon Peter's personal benediction, *Blessed art thou!*

To sum up once more. As we have taken possession, as a Christian congregation, of this house of our common assemblies, so our Lord takes possession of it, as the place where He will never fail to be in their midst. Let us, brethren, before we separate, expect that He who condescends to call this place His house of prayer will graciously show that He accepts this gift of one of His humble servants by such special tokens of His condescension as shall make this day memorable to us all. If not by such manifest and external demonstrations of His glory as silenced the worshippers in the first great temple, yet may He vouchsafe to prove by the sure influences of His grace, that this house, called by a name that that temple never bore, is accepted by Him, as the Lord of every true house of prayer throughout the world; and let us all join in earnest supplication that this day may be the earnest of an uninterrupted communion between Christ and His little flock in this place. May the two or three who will assemble here have the Lord's peace

among themselves, and grow in numbers through the conversion of sinners; thus contributing their humble part to that great consummation when Christ's house, like His name, shall be one throughout the earth, and to Him, from every part of the world, "shall the gathering of the people be."

BASIL THE GREAT.

II.—EXPOSITOR OF CHRISTIAN FAITH.

It is Basil, Exarch or Patriarch of Cæsarea from the year 370 to 378, who thus describes the state of the church in his time.

"Picture to yourself a sea-fight. Some bold sailors, who have so often fought that they cannot leave off fighting, having long brooded over old grudges, now bring their fleets together for action. The ships, as was the manner of the ancients, dash into each other desperately, all alike resolved to sink the enemy or to be sunk. At the same time a storm rises. The sky is black with clouds; the night falls. No signal can be seen; no ship distinguished. No one can tell whether he is in collision with foe or friend. The billows roll high; the tempest rages horribly. Some cry for mercy; some escape with their ships; and some take to their boats, to be swallowed up in the raging sea, or to be run down by drifting ships. Then, while the fleets disperse, the crews are in mutiny, or officers dispute with one another for command, or conspirators murder those that have it. Confused shouts of anger and of alarm mingle with the howling of the tempest, until no voice can be distinguished; where the captain retains his place, and the helmsman has not forsaken his helm, the one cannot make the other hear him; and even where there is a will to obey, there is no power to restore order amidst the terrible confusion. There is added to the crash of battle, the fury of the storm; and to the confusion of the storm, the visitation of some enervating disease, which lays the strongest prostrate; or some insane jealousy for glory diverts the seamen from every rational effort for self-preservation, until the battered ships all go down together. Even so, after the Arian schism had rent the church asunder, Catholic and Arian were waging war with almost equal bitterness on both sides; and when victory seemed hopeless to either, all the East, at least, appeared to be split up into innumerable factions. Private enmities, mean suspicions, and selfish aiming after honours, or wealth, or ascendancy, threw all things into inextricable confusion. The darkness of ignorance rested on the people, and men whom God had set to be the lights of the world, were overpowered by persecution, or their light was extinguished by some novel heresy. Men called Christians were destroying one another. In many places that which bore the name of preaching degenerated into an unintelligible controversial tumult. By exaggeration or by defect truth was so wretchedly handled as to become falsehood; many, while disputing on the mysteries of the Godhead, wandered back into Judaism by a denial of the Trinity; and