

disinterested service, He will not ask. He approves and loves and smiles on the beautiful enthusiasts who will not say "What shall we have?" But still He Himself says, "Him will My Father honour who serves Me in the contempt of self."

Finally, brethren, all this does not take away the essence of self-sacrifice, which still remains in its strength and severity and loveliness. It is hard to reconcile these contradictories in theory : we can best reconcile them in practice. And practically we may regard our Saviour as teaching us to regard the present life as the time of loss, the life to come as the time of gain. There is a sense in which the dying of the seed-corn covers the whole of our present probation ; and the much fruit from its death covers the whole of eternity. Let us give to time the sacrifice of time ; and to eternity the fruit of eternity. Let us pledge ourselves once more this day to follow our Lord, in the Great Renunciation, with His cross on our shoulders and also in our hearts, our self being firmly nailed to it for ever. And to Him who exemplified the lesson He teaches us, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be the glory! Amen.

## THE SANCTUARY ABOVE AND THE ASSEMBLY BELOW.\*

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“ Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

“ By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh ;

“ And *having* an high priest over the house of God ;

“ Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

“ Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering ; (for he *is* faithful that promised ;) )

“ And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works :

“ Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is* ; but exhorting *one another* : and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”—HEBREWS x. 19-25.

WITHOUT doing the least violence to the text, we may represent the sacred writer as exhorting us here to the twofold worship which is both offered in heaven and offered on earth. In terms of the highest sublimity he bids us boldly to enter the holiest, through the High Priest over the invisible house, and present ourselves with confidence and joy before the face of God. And then he calmly descends to the lower courts, telling us with marked emphasis that we must enter into the visible assembly also. Whether it was the purpose of the Holy Ghost to impress upon us the necessity of combining

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these—so that, while we remember our supreme privilege to worship in heaven by faith, we must not forget the worship of sight on earth,—I need not ask. Suffice that on an occasion like this, when we are assembled to dedicate a house of prayer, nothing can be more appropriate than thus to unite them. Let us ask the aid of the Spirit of grace and of supplications while we consider that the heavenly worship does not render the earthly needless; then that the visible worship must never be separated from the invisible and spiritual; and lastly that the two are in the highest worship of the church one as the type and earnest of the eternal worship above.

### I.

The tone of the passage evidently gives the pre-eminence, as it were, to the heavenly worship: to that which enters with Christ or through Christ, the High Priest, into the holiest within the veil. But when the writer so solemnly adds, "Forget not the assembling of yourselves together," he suggests that this latter has in its place and degree a deep importance of its own.

This will appear at once if we look steadily at the relation between the two; if we bear in mind that the one is the worship of the mystical and invisible church, while the other is the worship of that church, regarded as the same though now visible on earth. The Head of the spiritual body has passed through the veil of His sacrificed flesh into the heavens; and of course that body enters also in virtue of union with Him. In ancient times the typical high priest

entered alone, representing the people still outside; and he came out from the holiest to declare that the worshipping congregation was accepted, but at the same time to show that the true Holiest was not yet opened. Our High Priest over the house of God has entered, not as representing His people outside, but as taking them with Him; and He has not come out again, but abides there to give right of perpetual access to the presence of God. There is a sense in which all the members of the mystical body are in the heavenly places in Christ; like Him, or rather in Him, abiding by faith in the upper world. The text, however, seems to connect with this a rather different view. The High Priest, separate from His spiritual people, receives them as a body of worshippers who have left their sins behind them, are washed both by an outward and an inward baptism, and are constantly, not at set times only but always, drawing near to the Triune God through His mediation, offering their gifts of worship and thanksgiving. The exhortation is to the Hebrew church as belonging to this spiritual body. It seems to say to them: "You were wont to assemble in the temple and behold the high priest go trembling behind the veil, and wait trembling yourselves until he came out again. But now all is changed: that veil has been rent; the ancient narrow holiest has expanded into heaven itself; and we all, still the people of God but not a visible nation, enter boldly through and with our High Priest. Always hold fast and enjoy your privilege. Live and move and have your being with God, through Christ. Draw nigh to Him constantly as those who dwell in His

courts ; and so dwell in His courts as constantly to be drawing nigh."

But you see at once how that might be perverted ; and how necessary the other exhortation was. The Hebrews might say : " Then if we belong to Christ by faith, and by faith appear before God through His mediation, that is enough. We have done with earthly temples, and external worship, and worldly ceremonies for ever." No, the holy writer says : " We have an altar still. There is a visible as well as a mystical church ; there is a literal as well as a spiritual body. We still have our earthly sanctuary, though we do not give it that name. We still have officiating ministers, though not priests. And the baptized community of Christ must assemble around His name : to offer the worship of human tongues and united hearts, to proclaim the confession of His name before men ; to provoke one another to love and good works ; and to carry on the work of the Redeemer in the world." Brethren, we meet here this day as representing a portion of that spiritual fellowship concerning which our Lord said : " On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The Lord knows His own among us. But we meet also as representing the little organized community to which also He gave the name church : " Wherever two or three are gathered in My name, I am in the midst."

The double exhortation, however, gives all this a personal emphasis. The former deals with the Christian as a private worshipper, whose religion is matter of individual union with Christ and acceptance with God through Him. The latter deals with

him as a member of the visible church who must not forget to join himself to the company and share their visible worship. Here there are two things to be noted.

The having a name and place in heaven does not suffice of itself. It seems hard to say this; and certainly there is a sense in which nothing more is wanting either in heaven or in earth than to have the heart sprinkled and the body washed with the "heavenly washing," and to be one with Christ, and to have an introduction to the Holiest through Him. What more than this can be necessary for time or eternity? How many have so thought, and regarded a name and place in the visible church as of no importance. But the same Lawgiver who has ordained that salvation is only through the name of Jesus has also ordained that those who are "in process of salvation" should be "added to the church." Those whose conscience is sprinkled from sense of guilt have their bodies washed with the baptismal water. As the one mystical church is represented by a visible body, so the individual member of that spiritual family must be a member incorporate in that visible body. I say "must:" but you will not misunderstand the word. This obligation is not of the absolute, eternal character with the obligation to stand before God in Christ in the Holiest. But the Lord has made it obligatory nevertheless.

More than that, the exhortation proceeds on the supposition that many were tempted, and yielded to the temptation, to undervalue the regular, habitual gatherings of God's people. How many arguments would be at hand: how many excuses would be

ready! "We are freed from ceremony: that is the very glory of the new religion. God is a Spirit, and wants only the worship of spirit and truth." "Christ is at hand: to Him shall our gatherings be very soon." "I can edify myself by private meditation; and instruct myself as well at home as I can be instructed in public." All such apologies condemn themselves. There is a special blessing connected with the means of grace, which can be reached nowhere else. The hour of common worship has its own and peculiar heavenly benediction. And some of the acts of worship—such as the Lord's supper—convey their blessing ordinarily only to the assembly. Then correct your principles if they are lax; keep your place in the holiest; and value that if you will supremely; but forsake not the assembly below!

## II.

Now let us look at the other side of the question. The heavenly and spiritual worship requires the earthly; and we have heard the grave warning against neglecting the visible means of grace. But we should not really miss the meaning of the passage, if we inverted it, as follows: "Assemble yourselves together in the visible house; but do not forget to enter the holiest, as the manner of some is."

Much has been said about the veil being done away in Christ, and our entering with Him into an opened heaven. But that has to do only with the spiritual church. To that there is but one house of God: faith annihilates space and makes the universe, or at least heaven and earth, one great temple. But

the visible church meets in an outer court, before an invisible holiest, and with the veil woven, as it were, again. As we are expressly told, the High Priest is within the veil ; and there He receives, sanctifies, makes acceptable, and responds to the worship presented through Him on this side. There is literally no meaning in that worship unless it passes through the veil into the holiest. But all this is so far only general : let us look at a few particulars. .

Then take the gathering together itself. It is supposed to be an assembly of those who come to this place as only an outer court or vestibule of the holiest, or as the Scripture calls it "the gate of heaven." When we meet together it is to ask, and seek and knock at the door within which mercy waits. Private prayer is offered before the Father in secret. In a certain sense so also is public prayer. But there is special emphasis upon the united assembly, which gathers together to present its worship and petitions solemnly and believingly through the Great Mediator. We ought in fact to go back more or less to the old idea of the house of God with its outer congregation, waiting to offer its devotions and gifts to the invisible being behind the veil. It has been said again and again that the spiritual body is already with Christ, or enters into the Holiest through Him. Now it is well to remember that the visible assembly is still this side of the sanctuary and before the veil, and waiting to present offerings and receive benedictions through the Mediator within.

Consider the acts of worship we offer. They are supposed to be presented to God in the inner sanctuary : by which we mean rather in the invisible



holiest which is over this or surrounds it. Here we are within visible walls, in a place not essentially different from any other place; but our hymns, our confessions of sin, our supplications, our thanksgivings, our intercessions must go into the Holiest through the mediation of Jesus. They have literally no meaning if they do not. We do not pour out our confessions to men or to each other. We deliberately utter them to Jesus the High Priest that He may unite them with His intercession for us. We do not sing our hymns into the air and utter our worship to be echoed back from roof and walls. We know that they penetrate the thin veil and are heard beyond, because our High Priest makes them His own. We present our supplications general and personal in a solemn, stately, formal manner through the Mediator. It is so in every private prayer. But it is especially so in the general assembly, and in the public mediatorial services of the united Christian Church gathered together in one.

And as our petitions must go through to Him, so His answers must come through for us. We do not see our High Priest come out and with uplifted hand bless us. But He does invisibly by His Spirit respond to every part of our service. There is such a thing as a general blessing: doubt not this, though you can hardly understand it. No one can be present with a sincere desire and honest heart without feeling the general influence of grace from behind the veil. But of course all blessing must be particular. We bless God individually; and He replies "Blessed art thou!" "Bless the Lord," they said to the priests, "for us, ye who stand in the house of

the Lord!" The answer was, "the Lord who made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion." The assembly in the visible house is in mystical sympathy and correspondence with the invisible assembly in the upper house. And as the flow of devotion sets in to the Holiest through Jesus the Mediator, so the flow of benediction sets outwardly into the hearts of all who wait for it. The visible assembly is dignified and glorified by this union with the assembly invisible.

Here we may pause and make a further application; or rather pursue the subject into another region. It is obvious that we may find in this union, rightly understood, the safeguard against undue ritualism. What may be said to be meant by that? Many answers might be given, but one is enough here; its central evil is the forgetting that a veil does really exist, that the courts are distinct, and that the part of Christ within the holiest must not be intruded on. We must give to earthly service what belongs to earth, and give to the heavenly what belongs to heaven. If we draw the veil or screen below; and in the long withdrawn chancel erect an altar and present a sacrifice, we are invading the supremacy of the High Priest in heaven and going back to Judaism again. There is no priest permitted or needful on earth; nor is there any altar below; nor are there any sacrifices of expiation. All these are in the Holiest. And it is a great and grievous wrong both to the heavenly and to the earthly worship to forget the dependence of the one on the other. The principle is general, wider than the mere worship, and runs through the

whole economy. We do not see our Priest: it is the glory of our worship that we look beyond the minister to the Mediator behind and beyond him. We have no confessional and no confessor visible: we have indeed both, but they are not seen. We must accept the imperfection of our earthly worship. We are not anxious for its finished ritual. The best adornment of our poor houses is not before our eyes. We have the screen and the chancel: but both are visible only by faith. That this is so seems to many impatient worshippers to impoverish our service: it really enriches it unspeakably.

But it is obvious that we may forget the dependence of the outer on the inner court in another way. Ritualism is not our only, nor perhaps our greatest, peril. The danger is that of being content with an orderly and decent ceremonial, without ever thinking of that which entereth within the veil. We may very easily make the mistake of regarding the assembly and the sacred service as an end in itself; and suppose that we have done our duty when we have complied decently with the appointed order. It seems hard to believe that any could be so blind as to think that the demands of religion are satisfied by going through any prescribed service, and that the more elaborate it is the better. You perhaps are thinking that you make no such mistake. But you may be content to turn that service into your carnal enjoyment which you ought to make your spiritual duty. You may take a certain measure of delight in a ceremonial every part of which condemns your soul. This, alas, is the evil and the offence that clings to the walls of every

visible house of God, more or less, in broad Christendom.

It is possible also that we may come to regard that which really belongs to the outside service as the great concern : I mean the preaching and mutual exhortation which are here referred to. How many there are habitually in our congregations who forget the great object of the house of God as it is connected with the Holiest, and remember only the part of it that is connected with the service of religion below. There is, you see in the text, a certain object of the assembling together purely concerned with the duty of religion on earth : the exhortation or preaching, which is the medium of stimulant to all good works and to the promotion of diligence in expectation of the coming of Christ. If you look carefully you will see that this is a subordinate part of the worship of the Christian assembly as such. Perhaps I ought not to say subordinate : nothing can be subordinate in the sense of unimportant that keeps alive the Christian's sentiment of duty. Preaching and teaching will have a high place in the Christian assembly until He come whose coming will put an end to its necessity. But it is not right that the voice of man should be the highest charm in the house of God, and that house be regarded as a house of preaching. That again is to forget, even as the other abuses I have referred to forget, that the earthly assembly hangs on to the heavenly, and that all our service below, in the house of prayer, is only part of a worship the better part of which is not in this house at all. Let us not be satisfied with the voice of man, or the sound

of our own voices, when we may hear and rejoice in the voice of God.

### III.

In conclusion, the abundant context shows that the whole exhortation which we are now considering in both its parts has a special reference to the great future, when the assembling together and the entering into the Holiest will be separate and distinct no more, but be one for ever.

Throughout the Scripture the earthly assembling of God's people is regarded as the type, earnest, and foretaste of the everlasting assembly, the general assembly of the future world. The very house of God is, with all its simplicity, a kind of type of heaven : shut in from the world, and the place of union in the presence of God. The Sabbath as the day of gathering—the only day on which, in fact, the Christian Church as a whole can assemble—is the type of the eternal rest in God. You will also remember that the very expression here, “gathering together,” is used in an affecting relation to our final meeting around our visible Lord : “I beseech you,” says St. Paul, “by our gathering together unto Him.” Our Lord has kept that thought in His people's hearts by the words He used on the only occasion when He spoke of the assembling of Christians. “Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst.” He is in the midst, but we see Him not. He has promised, however, to come again and receive us to Himself : that where He is there we may be also. Every time we gather together around the invisible

Lord we are reminded by everything we see and do of the time when we shall gather round His visible presence. The minister and his preaching, the liturgical books and worship, the sacramental symbols and seals, will be abolished. He will displace them all by the blessedness of His own personal ministry to us for ever. And this it was which gave a peculiar force to the exhortation : "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is ; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Again, our present entering into the Holiest is itself a type and pledge and earnest of our final entering into the heavens in a higher and nobler sense. We ascend by faith into the presence of God ; and every personal act of that faith, as well as its every united act, reminds us that the time is coming when we shall enter no longer by faith but visibly and as it were by sight. The veil that keeps us from the Holiest in person is that of our own flesh. That also must be rent before we can enter. Then shall we finally be in a temple filled with the glory of the Lord, the lamp of which shall be the Lamb : the only manifestation of the Presence of God we can ever have. After all that has been said about our present entering, it is at best an entrance now with many qualifications. We enter with Christ and in Him : yet we are shut up to blind and naked faith. Sometimes, it is true, the restraint of faith seems to be burst, and we feel as if we were already in that other sanctuary. But we awake like Jacob from a dream. The time, however, is coming when the heavenly worship will be precisely as plain and

visible as this is in which we now engage. Faith shall not be as it has been so long the master principle. We shall be ourselves where our faith now is ; and the Holiest shall be our home for ever. Of that also every service on earth reminds us : keeping up a perpetual remembrance that the way into the eternal sanctuary is not finally and fully opened.

When that time comes the two will be one. The gathering around the Lord will be assembling around the High Priest in the Holiest : though both Holiest and High Priest are terms that will have lost their meaning. The mystical and the visible churches shall be one at last : they have never been so on earth, nor ever will be, until that final gathering together around Him in the heavens. The assemblies will be assemblies no more, for they shall never break up. We shall not enter the Holiest by faith ; for we shall never leave it again. The two worships of which so much has been said in this discourse shall be one for ever. But it is not merely the prophecy and promise of this that the text dwells upon. The worship of earth is regarded as having for its design to keep alive this blessed hope. Happy, brethren, shall we be if our habitual attendance in this place nourishes and keeps alive the hope of that eternal worship : of that blessed day when we shall enter a congregation that shall never break up, but be gathered together around the Incarnate Saviour for eternity in an assembly which shall be composed, not of a few hundreds of our fellow Christians constantly changing, but of the universal multitude of all that shall be found in Him.

Every meeting both suggests and prophesies and

prepares us for that assembly. Here we are rehearsing our future worship : or at any rate are cherishing, improving, and perfecting those sentiments which will fit us for that eternal gathering and that eternal service. But especially is the supper of the Lord designed to promote that object. It has a very special and affecting relation to both the higher and the lower worship of which we have spoken. As it respects the lower, it is the feast which reminds us that the Lord is gone for a season that we may "receive Him for ever." "We do shew forth the Lord's death till He come." Each commemoration brings us together around Him in hope and expectation of our final gathering into His presence no more to be sundered from Him. And in this ordinance the High Priest comes from the Holiest as it were to seal on our hearts the virtue of the sacrifice which He is pleading behind the veil. He admits us by faith into the inmost sanctuary, and gives us the blessed pledges of our union with Him. It is as if He said : "Take this and live by Me ; drink this, and partake of My death. But go into the world for a season thus armed and replenished. Soon I will come and receive you into the real Holiest, the heavens of my Personal Presence, where sacraments shall be needed no more !" To Him be glory for ever. Amen.