

amazing hope. And let it not be said that this has nothing to do with our sonship in particular: being generally true of our hope of heaven. The simple truth is that our sonship is here altogether and only concerned. It gives a specific character to our future state. Heaven does not exhaust the idea of our destiny: that will be the common abode of all but the lost. Nor does life: for that will be shared by endless multitudes of beings of whom we as yet have little revelation. Nor, indeed, does the vision of God: that will be shared by all the pure intelligences whose companions we shall be. But to be one with the Eternal Son Incarnate in His glory, and to be one with Him as He is one with the Father, and to be sharers of all that the Father will give Him as the reward of His humiliation and sorrow and death: all this is the special characteristic and prerogative and dignity of the sons of God. To borrow St. Paul once more: We were "predestinated unto the adoption of sons!" And we wait for our eternal destiny, as "waiting for the adoption!" To Him, the Eternal Son, incarnate for us, with the Holy Ghost, be glory for ever. Amen.

THE NIGHT COMETH: THE DAY IS AT HAND.*

“The night cometh, when no man can work.”—JOHN ix. 4.

“The night is far spent, and the day is at hand.”—ROM. xiii. 12.

WE may take it for granted that there is no contradiction here ; though the two texts seem to affirm the exact opposite of each other. The Lord on one side of the day of Pentecost, and the apostles on the other side of it, always agree, though very often their language differs. To harmonize them, and in doing so to mark the reasons of the apparent discrepancy, is one of the most profitable exercises of our devout meditation : let the subject be what it may. The instance we have now before us is one of the most striking in itself and of the most profoundly interesting in its application. Our Saviour tells us that our day is passing and our night is coming ; St. Paul tells us that our night is passing and our day is coming. We must now aim to reconcile these two ; to show how they are one in our personal religion ; and to derive salutary lessons from their unity. This would be of the deepest importance at any time ; but it is specially commended to

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us at the present season, and by the solemn memorial of this evening's service. May the Holy Spirit, the interpreter alike of our Lord and His apostle, direct our thoughts aright and seal them to our hearts.

I.

The season reminds us of the Advent of our Lord: both His first and His second Advent for human salvation. And this suggests the first and highest illustration of the oneness of our texts, as found in the meaning of day and night to our Lord Himself. This will be seen to underlie all the others.

"As long as I am in the world," He said, "I am the light of the world." He is that Sun which arose upon mankind when the sun of Paradise set: the light of human history, "enlightening every man that cometh into the world." But He is also the Sun of His own one day, the day of man's redemption. That was its dawn, when he cried as the youth, "I must be in My Father's business." Here is its meridian, when He still says, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh:" the transfiguration noon being passed, soon after which we hear Him declare, "between the evenings," "I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do." His night came, and His sun set, "while it was yet day." But in that "great and notable day" the world was saved. His departure was the night season of His rest from His labours and sufferings and infinite sorrows. His works follow Him; and eternity will be filled with the results of that one day for which all other days were made.

But our Lord's night was only the dawn of another day, which is still more emphatically called "the day of Christ." There is a sense in which He knew no night. As soon as His sun set in the west, its return in the east began at once to be proclaimed. A higher watchman than he of Dumah cries from heaven to earth with a change in the cry, "The night cometh, and also the morning." And all the New Testament scriptures respond; they also cry aloud, "The day of the Lord is at hand." The church of Christ from the time of its foundation in Jerusalem took up the note; and has continued to expect His coming from age to age, reckoning a thousand years, and a second thousand if need be, as one day. And though the Lord "delayeth His coming" as one who is gone "into a far country for a long time," His people see in all history the signs of His coming; and wait for Him "as they that wait for the morning." It will be the world's "midnight when the cry will be heard;" but His saints midday, for "their night is far spent" already.

Now, you see at once the great and fundamental reconciliation of the Lord and the apostle. The Master's text was spoken on the shadowy side of the cross and the sepulchre, with the night season of His sacrificial death before Him; the deep gloom of which was but faintly betokened by the three hours' darkness which hid the sufferer from all but God. St. Paul's text was spoken with the cross and the sepulchre behind him, with his eye fixed on the second coming, which was to him as certain a reality as the day that shone around him while he wrote. And we must remember that the Lord Himself re-

conciled the two in His own words; for He adopts almost the language of His apostle: "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with me." We may regard Him as writing the two texts thus: "It is appointed to men to die once; and much more is it appointed to Me once to die. My night of betrayal and abandonment is at hand. But My day is also at hand, when I shall come a second time, without sin to weigh Me down to death, unto salvation to all them that look for My appearing."

II.

Now, you observe that the same prophecy which tells us that "He will come a second time to those who look for Him" tells us that "it is appointed to men once to die." And we must therefore combine our texts into unity by regarding ourselves as sustaining two distinct relations: one which is personal and anticipates the evening of life and the night of death; the other which is not personal, but corporate, and belongs to the church which can never die.

As individuals we may say with Elijah, "I shall die; I am no better than my fathers." "So teach me to number my days that I may apply my heart unto wisdom;" or rather, in the light of our text, "to number my hours, my moments, and to mark how surely my little sun is passing over my little sky." "I must work while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work;" the grave is waiting for me, where there is no device to retrieve time or use it. "The living know that they shall

die ;” and, as a living man, I accept my lot and must prepare to meet my Judge. But as members of the mystical church of Christ the matter stands to us very differently. Each of us belongs to the company of pilgrims which has been redeemed from death, and is going onward from generation to generation to meet the Lord. As a man he belongs to a dying race ; but as a Christian he belongs to the church against which “the gates of Hades shall not prevail.” That church, like Rachel, buries her dead and mourns “because they are not ;” but lives on nevertheless. He may be buried by the wayside ; but his name is nevertheless “written among the living.” “Refrain thy voice from weeping,” said the prophet to Rachel ; “thy children shall come again.” So he shall die himself as an individual ; but as a member of Christ he shall never die.

Here we have a true and adequate reconciliation of our texts. There is nothing of unreality in this : it is not a forced interpretation. We are all familiar enough with the idea that we are very different persons in different aspects of our relations. A thousand evidences might be adduced ; but I will illustrate it by a notion prevalent in this age which is a frightful perversion and caricature of our truth. We are told that as men individually we are on our way not only to death but to extinction also ; while our consolation is that in the race, in humanity, going on to perfection we live on for ever. Hear how the Positive Philosophers parody our texts. “We must work the works that fate has assigned ; and do them well, for our deep eternal night cometh when no man can work. But the night of human evolution is far

spent ; the day is at hand for our struggling race ; and all the good we do will help forward the ideal Mankind. And that thought must be instead of personal immortality." Their parody, brethren, is our truth. We have two relations. In the one, we lay our account with death ; and shall only live on below in our works. But, in the other, we know that we are citizens of heaven ; and that we belong to the new race of saved humanity which is immortal in the heavens.

III.

It was said that this is a true and adequate reconciliation. True it undoubtedly is ; but perhaps it is scarcely adequate, for the separate relations are not quite so distinct as they have been made. It is not that, on the one hand, I must die, while on the other the church I belong to lives : the resurrection being supposed to supply the link. However true that may be, it does not join the texts as closely as it is our privilege to join them in our daily life of experience and hope. This will appear if we attend to two prominent truths of the New Testament which shed light on our subject.

First, death is regarded as really joining the departed soul to the number of those who are expecting the Lord's second advent. It is death, as the separation of the soul and body. But it does not for an instant interrupt the waiting for Christ which has begun in life. The only difference is that the separated spirit waits for Him without the body. Mark how much prominence St. Paul gives to this when writing to the Thessalonians on the very

subject. There were some whose hearts mourned over their departed because they were cut off from the great expectation of welcoming the Lord's return. They in their present ignorance thought that such as ended their day on earth ceased to have any interest in the great expectation : at least, they had no notion of the connection between the two which St. Paul establishes. He corrects their fears, and tells them that those who wait for Christ on earth would have no advantage over the sleepers even if He came ; for that He would bring with Him those who "sleep in Jesus" to share in the glorious revelation. He does not say that they are now waiting in Paradise to join the procession : for that we must go to the Apocalypse. But he says enough to establish our point : that the expecting of night here and of day there, and both as parts of one undivided expectation, does unite our two texts. Whether on earth or in Paradise those who are in Christ and love His appearing are "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious manifestation of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

Now take another view. Looking carefully at the strain of New Testament references to the last things, we cannot help marking that the prospect of dying and the prospect of receiving the Lord from heaven, are blended in one common perspective ; or rather as an alternative which every one must contemplate as undecided. In other words, the Christian revelation has left it for every age matter of uncertainty whether believers shall go to the Lord through death or the Lord will come to them without death. The second advent is the horizon as

certainly for individuals as for the church. "We that are alive and remain," says the apostle; and, not in one passage only but everywhere, the prospect of the believer is in a strait betwixt two: not exactly the apostle's strait betwixt living and dying, but betwixt Christ coming to him or his going to Christ. It might almost appear as if it were the intention of the Divine Head of the church, that every Christian to the end of time should have both prospects before him, the night and the day: the Lord Himself deciding between them. One set of passages are so framed that they seem to sustain the theory of the Millenarians, that it may be said of any generation, "There be some standing here that shall not taste of death till these things are fulfilled." In the light of these passages St. Paul's is the text: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." But then there is another class which change the tone: "Whether we wake or sleep, we live together with Him." "Let no man perplex you as if the day of the Lord were come, or very near at hand. There must be a falling away first, a large développement of evil, a universal ingathering of the Gentiles, a resurrection of the dead Jewish nation, the coming of Antichrist." In the light of these passages our Lord's is the text: "The night cometh, when no man can work." But only, you must remember, as an alternative. Putting them together we cannot but see that they harmonize our two texts so far as this goes, that none can set out on the Christian career without having the two prospects before him, and being uncertain which will be his lot. It is true that this applies chiefly to the young. To the aged it

will not apply: they know full well that events must take place on the scene of human action which they cannot live to see, though their children may. So St. Paul when he became "such an one as Paul the aged" dismisses the thought of witnessing Christ's return: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." His expectation of his crown is postponed to "that day."

You see, then, that there is a certain sense in which we may all combine the Lord's words and the apostle's in our own prospect. The young have the alternative that they may die or that they may witness the coming of the Lord: that is the reconciliation for them. The elders can fall back upon the other thought that they are going into the company of those who join the coming Redeemer some other way, even by the side portals of death. Thus we all have our portion in both the texts. Some who sit here may be caught up in the great Transfiguration, having their bodies "fashioned like unto His glorious body" without the resurrection. But most of us, probably all, must enter into the shades of evening and through the gates of night join the great Procession that will meet the Lord.

IV.

You cannot but have felt, brethren, that thus far we have assumed death to be a reality; and have expounded our Saviour's night which is coming as meaning our individual decease. But, strictly speaking, our first text says not a word about our dying. It regards every Christian as joined with the Lord in

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having a day's work set before him, which he must do with his might, since the time to cease and go to rest is at hand. Pause for a moment to observe the application to Jesus Himself. I need not ask whether His words were "We must work the works of Him that sent Me": if He said that, then it might appear that He sets us an example. There was the blind man: blind from his birth. The disciples would inveigle Him into controversy or draw from Him some profound secret of the Divine government. We sympathize with their question; but the Lord answered it in His own way. "The man is there, and is what he is, that the works of God may be manifest in him: that I also may do My appointed work as the Healer of body and soul: here is an opportunity for My skill." It was His divine opportunity for showing His power, teaching many truths to the people, and giving His disciples a permanent lesson. It was not possible that He would neglect anything that could be crowded into His short day. Yet He says: "I must work!" His thought, brethren, was on us all. We need to be told, and we are told, that we are sent into the world to do a work, which if done at all must be done before the evening comes: a work, however, which if we do it well will have the night of rest to follow it; and to follow that again another day, or a to-morrow of heavenly service.

But we are too much forgetting that there is no death in the text. It is as if that word were carefully avoided; for the time is fast coming when the Saviour will say, "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." He has "abolished death" to His

people by bringing "life and immortality to light." There are many ways of linking time and eternity together; it would take time to enumerate them. Suffice that here our Saviour impresses on us that we have a commission to discharge, a day's work to do, and then give account of it and be rewarded. For the apostle joins on where the Lord leaves off. The day is at hand, when all the labourers shall have their hire: their own salvation individually, and their relative place according to the measure of their toil for others. "I come quickly, to give to every man as his work shall be." The rewards of the day's work, however, do not appear in either of the texts, or in their combination; we must therefore not dwell upon them. It is enough to recall to our thoughts how constantly the Master connects His coming back with His examination of the conduct of those whom He trusted with talents that they might "occupy till He come."

Let us, however, keep close to our one topic: the harmonising of these texts. Uniting them we gather the truth which is the most solemn at once and the most joyful we can learn, that our existence is one continuous whole: running on through all the variations of time, undergoing a certain remarkable change at what we call death, and still going on for ever. Take the two passages, and, with this thought in your mind, make one flow into the other. But let the Lord himself blend them: rather, let us ask how He would blend them, and find the answer in His own words. "I am the light and sun of this world to every man. Each has a day, longer or shorter, in which he must work the works of God. His night

when it comes bids him retire from work, and wait upon his Lord's further will. After ploughing or feeding cattle, for instance, all the hard day, he does not at once receive his final rest and reward; he still stands and waits." But we must not include that parable, which rather alters the view; nor must we think of that other where the labourers are called to receive their hire. These teach their own lessons. But this one—our own text—has its peculiar teaching, which almost requires St. Paul's addition. So let us hear the Lord again. "He cannot work; but must wait till day reappears. The day is at hand; the night is far spent; My servants who slumber and sleep in the intermediate state awhile must be up and doing when the cry is heard, 'It is time to wake out of sleep!'" The day's work must begin again: but in a day which does not measure off twelve hours, and is followed by no afternoon, evening, or night, where the sun stands still upon the new Jerusalem for ever. Here, fellow Christians, is the reconciliation. Death is only the introduction to a state where "no man can work": probation has ended, self-discipline has ended, charity to others has ended. The man himself still lives, between the past and the future. But the opportunity of changing the past or providing for the future is for ever gone.

V.

Here, then, we are at last landed where all discourses should land us: in the practical application. The final and most important harmonizing of our texts is this: that in our life of daily preparation for

the future we must let the two thoughts strictly unite, however difficult it may seem. In other words, the true theory of living shows its perfection in being at once a fitness to die and a fitness to receive the coming Lord ; at once, I say ; for there is only one preparation for both.

It is a preparation to die. After all, dying is a tremendous reality. It might seem as if our two texts taken together would abolish death before the time ; but that is a mistake. Religion is the prudent life which regards this state as a probation for another, death being the term and seal of that probation. Notwithstanding all that the Conqueror has done to rob it of its terrors, death has in it what needs no special pleading to emphasize. It speaks for itself. Our Lord Himself has paid His tribute to its awe. I do not mean in His "strong crying and tears" when He approached it: that had a reason which no physical dying will explain. But I mean the tribute of His tears over our death, and the havoc it produces among us. It is a dread and solemn thing to die : it is so even in old age, when nature seems simply to fall asleep ; but to be arrested in the mid-career of life and probation, to be suddenly grappled with and to be hurried from time and opportunity for ever !

And not less solemn is the alternative of ending life by the sudden coming of the Lord: though this we too seldom take into our calculation. Death we know, and all the agonies that precede it we know ; but what is this swift rapture into eternity which shall befall the last generation ! This will be the most sudden of all sudden deaths. And in itself it must

needs be the most awful experience possible to man. If religion is a preparation to die well, it must also be a constant readiness to meet the Judge when He suddenly comes.

Now, terrible as death is, and terrible as is the thought of being suddenly called to meet the Judge, both are divested of all their terror by the preparation that keeps both equally in view. There is but one preparation: viewed as to the coming night of our first text it is simply a right use of the day; viewed as to the coming day, it is simply a full delight in the expectation of its approach; viewed in their union it is simply the mingling of solemnity and joy in the prospect.

The apostle's admonitions and exhortations in the second text, which have not yet been referred to, show how entirely the preparation for the night is also the preparation for the day. In fact, the words are so chosen that they are equally adapted for both prospects. Here is the perfect preparation to die well; and it is also the perfect preparation for the coming day. We are supposed to be thoroughly awakened from the sleep of sin; to have been aroused, and effectually converted, and to have received the earnest of salvation. We have thrown aside for ever the garments of night, abandoned the revelries and abominations of the service of sin, and, having put off the old man with his deeds, put on the new man; so that, clothed with the Lord Jesus, we may meet Him in His own vesture and stand before Him accepted. This total abandonment of sin and of all earthly vanities, and this reflection of the image of Christ, is all that we need to die well;

and it is all that He will seek at His coming. But you must mark how wonderfully St. Paul joins what we are supposed to BE with what we must take care to BECOME. And our own consciences will tell us better than the expositors and critics why he makes this change. This is the perfect double preparation; but how few there be that find it! Much reason have we to ask ourselves still whether it is not high time that we should be thoroughly aroused, whether even now we do not need, as it were, a fresh conversion, and to be plunged again into the waters of regeneration and new life. Let us look well at our lives, and ask if we are really walking with unsullied dignity as if in the clear day of eternity already begun to dawn. Let us begin afresh this day, and resolve to combine the two texts in our experience as we never have combined them before. Ceasing to make provision for the flesh we must regard it as crucified and let it die. When that is dead within us we shall be fit to live with Christ for ever. If we have our conversation in heaven before the time we shall be ready for the day of the Lord that comes after death. Let the powers of this world more entirely cease for us; and the powers of the world to come more effectually begin.

Brethren, how lovely is the experience of the man in whose daily life these two texts exercise their perfect influence. He does not dwell in his thoughts on death and judgment and the day of the Lord with their terrors; these to him are transfigured, and suffused with a glory that casts out all fear. He thinks only or mostly of his progressive, continuous, ever-brightening future. All his anticipation is one:

it is treasured up in Christ, to be revealed from stage to stage as its successive hours shall come. That is enough for him. His present day is inexpressibly precious ; every moment of it is stamped with the value of eternity ; and no man desires life as he desires it. Therefore the thought of its end is solemn. But the other world has its own infinite secret of bliss ; and the solemnity of his departure is tempered with an awful joy. He mingles the daily preparation to die with the daily longing for heaven in a manner that defies description. It must be known to be understood. Every evening he tells off the diminishing fragments of his earthly existence : “ now am I a day nearer to the appointed doom of sin.” But every evening he tells off the diminishing fragments of the period that keeps him from true life : “ now is my salvation one day nearer than when I believed.” Sorrowful, he is always rejoicing ; dying, behold he lives. Such a man will never really die : death hath no more dominion over him. He leaves night finally and for ever behind ; and as he lived so he dies, “ in the day ;” through the grace of union with his Lord, “ Who died for us that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory for ever. Amen.

