

SUNDAY TEACHINGS.

[By the Rev. Henry W. Little, Rector of Trinity Church, Sussex, N.B.]

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The prayer of the *Collect* is for a joyous readiness in the service of God. Samuel 'ran' to Eli. 1 Sam. iii, 5. The 'joy' of the Christian Life, Eph. v, 15-22. 'Always rejoicing,' 2 Cor. vi, 10. 'I will run the way of Thy Commandments,' Ps. cxix, 32. (Cant. 1.4, 'We will run after Thee.') Pious alacrity a mark of Faith. 'Most merciful.' God is more full of sympathy and love for us than the kindest and tenderest friend we ever had; see e.g., Is. xlix, 15-16. 'To be ready,' on the alert, 'cheerfully,' joyously, not 'grudgingly' or 'of necessity' or custom, or because the eye of the world or the Church is upon us, but 'of love,' must the service be. God loveth the 'cheerful' giver, 11 Cor. ix, 7. His service is not of constraint, but one of 'perfect freedom.' We are to be quickened in religion not by the lash of a tyrant or the goad of a taskmaster, but by the inspiration of love for God. Sacrifice test of love. Will, time, money, tastes, companions, etc., etc. The Church in the *Collect* desires for her children that they may 'accomplish' things that God would have done, i.e., finish them, carry them out to the end. It is not good to begin many things, but to finish those we take in hand is wisdom. The frayed ends of much unfinished work in the Church is discouraging. The work which God gave His Son to do was 'finished.' 'It is finished,' St. John xix, 30. So with the wall of Jerusalem which Nehemiah undertook to rebuild—'the wall was finished,' Neh. vi, 15. To the Church worker the *Collect* conveys a hint as to effective work, that is the 'finished' work. How bright the examples in this respect of such lives as those of Bishop Pattison and his native college in the South Seas, Bishop Steere and his translations of the Scriptures into the native tongues of East Africa, the patient, plodding toil of Bishop Horden on the shores of Hudson's Bay for nearly half a century. The spirit of the age is unfavourable to solid, steady finished spiritual effort; there is therefore the more need that prayer should be made that what is taken in hand for Christ may be completed—'accomplished.' 'Faithful in a few things,' St. Luke xvi, 10. Better thus than half-hearted in overmuch labour.

The *Epistle* describes 'the things that may hurt us' and hinder cheerful and ready service, and so prevent the 'finishing' of God's work in the world. i. Time to be well used, every moment has its duty. 'The days are evil' not in the sense of the Apostle who was speaking of a time of open persecution and of heathenism dominant. 'The evil' of these days in which we live has taken on another form, e.g., luxury and sensual ease and softness of manners and morals, a polite negation of the ethical force of Church membership, a Christian paganism which outwardly conforms to the demands of the Church, but refuses to submit will and life to the control of the Holy Spirit. Again the insolence of wealth has to be met by the assertion of the Truth of God. 'Because thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art poor and blind and naked, I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich,' Rev. iii, 17-18. The material joys and physical delights not to be compared with the 'heart songs' and spiritual consolations of the heavenly life, lived in love and in the fear of the Lord.

The *Gospel* describes in a beautiful figure the blessings of the Christian Covenant. The char-

acteristic incident of the narrative is the story of the guest who neglected to put on the wedding garment provided by the gracious bounty of the king. The 'wedding garment' is no other than 'the righteousness of Christ' which the Christian is to 'put on,' and in which alone he can draw nigh to the Banquet of Eternal Joys spread in the Palace of the Great King. To 'put on' the Christ character, to clothe ourselves with His virtues, to be filled with His mind: this is what God would have men do now in this mortal life. It is for each to set about this duty with alacrity and cheerfulness. The things that may hurt us shown in the *Gospel*. i. Indifference to God's call as given through Jesus Christ to humanity at large to return and be the partakers in His bounty and the recipient of His favours. ii. Secret indifference leads at length to open violence, e.g., servants slain. Martyrs, Confessors of the Church in every age. Our own century no exception. The spirit of the world never changes. iii. Individual preparation overlooked: the 'wedding garment' neglected. Each soul must be 'clothed' in the raiments of righteousness provided for it by the adorable sacrifice of Christ. Personal sanctification, as well as Church membership, essential to acceptance at the last.

The First Morning Lesson, Ezek. x, iv.—The duty of those in authority—'shepherds'—e.g., kings, governors, parents, to consider the needs and provide for the wants of 'the sheep,' those who are given into their charge. The selfishness and covetousness of 'the hireling' shepherd condemned. The justice and mercy of the new Kingdom of the Messiah present a pleasing contrast to the earlier descriptive portion of this chapter (which is full of wholesome truth for all in public offices or places of responsibility.)

The Second Morning Lesson, Phil. i., gives, as is often the case, an example of 'readiness and cheerfulness' in Christian service, which is full of life and joy as compared with the Old Testament Lesson just read, e.g., verses 3, 5, 6: the prayer that the Phillipians may 'accomplish' what God would have them do, verse 10. The Apostle 'ready and cheerful.' 'To me to live is Christ: to die is gain.'

The First Evening Lesson, Amos iv, v. 4.—Examples of the 'judgments' of God in the phenomena of the natural world. God rules all. Drought, scarceness, mildew, the pestilence, all God permitted for moral purposes. These judgments failed to do their work. There was no repentance, no return to God. 'Ye have not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.' The call, 'Prepare to meet thy God.' The unreadiness of Israel to be instructed by the circumstances of life. Nature in her various phases, now of friendliness, now of hostility, has many precious words of counsel for us. 'He that hath ears to hear let him ear.' 'For lo! He that formed the mountains and created the wind, and declareth unto man what is in his thought, that maketh the morning darkness and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, the Lord, the God of Hosts, is His Name.'

The Second Evening Lesson, St. Luke v. to v. 17.—The readiness and cheerful obedience of Peter to the commands of Christ in the face of past discouragement, verse 5. The result. The Word of Christ directs us as to what God would 'have done.' The world with its discouragements would say why toil and in the end 'accomplish' nothing. The voice of Faith replies to the Voice of the Divine Master. At Thy Word I will let down the net.' Work done in obedience to the Divine purpose is 'finished'—the ships were so full that 'they began to sink,' a visible proof to the most faithless there that Christ was God and trode upon 'the high places of the earth,' in the sense of the First Evening Lesson.

LA BOCCA DELLA VERITA.

By E. C. VANSITTART.

'Only be true—true to thyself—true with thy God.'

[CONTINUED.]

A very ancient fable thus accounts for the existence of this relic: Virgil, shocked at the utter disregard of all obligations shown by his debased countrymen, caused a marble mask to be erected, and proclaimed it to be endowed by the gods with supernatural and omniscient powers in the detection of falsehood: any whose words were untrue, as he stood with his hand in the aperture, would be chained there, or only recover his freedom at the cost of his limb. The idea took and became firmly rooted in the popular mind, and the test never failed till on a certain occasion an unfaithful wife, forced by her indignant husband to justify herself in the usual way, eluded the accusation and yet rendered the test powerless by the following trick: She ordered her lover to feign madness, and as she was going to the mask of the *Bocca della Verita*, to throw his arms around her, and embrace her in spite of her struggles, with every sign of mental aberration,—all of which he carried out; then the woman, putting her right hand in the Mouth, and feigning anger and indignation at the base accusation brought against her, swore that no man alive save her husband and the poor lunatic whom they had just seen, had ever embraced her: thus she hoodwinked the oracle, and issuing unhurt from the terrible ordeal, she was acquitted, but Virgil, from whom no gossip could be kept, confessed that the craftiness of women surpassed the astuteness of men, and from that day the effigy lost its power.

A learned Barnabite monk has offered another explanation, which seems a most simple one, viz., that the slab served as a lid to the sacred cistern where were stored the waters dedicated to Mercury close to the Church of Santa Maria; this Ovid refers to when he represents the cattle dealers of the adjacent *Forum Boarium* (cattle-market) as resorting to the *fons Mercurii* (fountain of Mercury), there to wash their hands after the day's sharp practice and cheaterly, invoking their patron to "cleanse our perjuries of the Past; oh! cleanse us from the untrue words of to-day," which, says the poet, the tutelary god of thieves never failed to do, as, miling, he recalled how once he had stolen the oxen of Apollo.

Should this be so, time is blotted out, and we stand before the survivor of nineteen centuries, or if we accept the surmise that the mask was the frontal of an altar to Jupiter Ammon (patron of oaths and avenger of perjury) we see another picture rise up from amid the mists of the Past; a cohort of soldiers in glittering armour, with drawn swords, keep guard around the altar, and a crowd stands by, while those accused of the crime of perjury are led up to the open Mouth on whose decision hangs the momentous issue of life or death (for conviction doomed the prisoner to be hurled from the Tarpeian rock.) We may well believe the hand of many a trembling criminal became so paralyzed by fear and the workings of an evil conscience that he found it impossible to withdraw it from contact with those huge lips,—thus his doom would be sealed, and he would be hurried off to the dread precipice and shoved into Eternity; while another, strong in conscious innocence, would fearlessly place his hand in the dreaded aperture, and in clear, ringing voice speak the words on whose truth his life depended; shouts of approval breaking forth from the assembled throng, he was released from his chains and borne triumphantly home. Stern and pitiless were the laws of the ancient Romans, and terrible the penalty paid