

against the heir to his title and estates, even to the leaving away from him by will the very deer in his park. At last, however, he relented and repented; but too late for restitution. He sent for the family solicitor to alter the terms of his will; but before the lawyer could arrive, the earl was dead. He carried if not an unforgiving spirit, at least an unatoned wrong, on to the judgment of the world to come. But such are not the only instances of the unforgiving spirit. It may be shown in matters which are comparatively fleeting and small, yet which constantly affect our Christian life. Do not forget, the petition which precedes this in the great Prayer is, "Give us *this day* our daily bread"; remember the word "*and*," which links the two clauses together, "*and* forgive us our trespasses," reminds us that, as we need our daily bread, so also we daily need God's forgiveness, and must daily bestow it, if needed, on others.

It may be said, indeed, that forgiveness, to be *deserved*, implies a real repentance in the person forgiven, and that we have no means of being certain that the repentance is real. True, but also we have no means of being certain that it is *not* real; and we are bound to give in all such cases what we call "the benefit of the doubt." In the most sublime prayer for the forgiveness of others ever uttered—our Lord's words on the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"—was there not something of a charitable hope, rather than an assured conviction, that those who abetted the greatest crime in the world's history sinned only through ignorance? Some of those who heard His words, though they knew not who it was whom they had condemned and crucified, must have known at least that they had aided in the judicial murder of an innocent Person. Yet these, too, are included in the large-heartedness of the Saviour's prayer. We must imitate that large-heartedness in not limiting our forgiveness by qualifications or conditions, nor spoiling its graciousness by the taint of a still lingering animosity. "Yes, I forgive him, but I never want to see him again," or, "I forgive, but I can never forget"—such a limitation takes away all that gives the forgiveness its value and its charm.

Forgiveness, indeed, is to many people, save on rare occasions, only too easy a virtue. First, because many of us have so *little to forgive*. The petition in the

Litany, "That it may please Thee to forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and to turn their hearts," passes us by, as it were, untouched. We have no enemies, no persecutors, no slanderers; none whose hearts, as far as we are concerned, require to be turned. And, secondly, do not some of us, simply by the natural disposition which God has given them, often *forgive because they forget*? The person who gave the offence sometimes remembers it when he to whom it was given has forgotten it. Now, to forgive without forgetting, though not in the sense in which the expression has just been used, is a Divine work. Almighty God cannot, in any strict and proper sense of the term, be said to forget the sins which He has forgiven. Our notion of the mind of God, so far as we can form any such idea at all, must include at least the potential presence in that mind of the record of the misdoings of all His creatures, even though all the trespasses, or, as St. Matthew has it, the "debts," may have been cancelled by the red line of the blood of Christ drawn across them. That kind of forgiveness, therefore, is likeliest to God's forgiveness, which, while it does not, cannot, "blot out" the recollection of the offence forgiven, yet replaces the offending person in the former position of mutual regard or affection, and wipes out the old debts as if they had never been incurred.

To such a forgiveness, then, we are called by the very prayer which is daily on our lips. The ten thousand talents of a world's transgressions are freely condoned by the price of the Saviour's blood; it remains for us to forgive as freely the hundred pence of our own mutual offences, that on us, too, may be bestowed the absolution of Him who alone "hath power on earth to forgive sins," and who bestows it freely on those who forgive their brethren. "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee; arise and walk."

THE NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

(JUNE 24TH.)

MAY thy dread voice around,
Thou harbinger of Light,
On our dull ears still sound,
Lest here we sleep in night,
Till judgment come,
And on our path
Shall burst the wrath,
And deathless doom.—ISAAC WILLIAMS.