

of such a proviso does not appear. But whatever that may be, in the estimation of those who refuse to yield submission to the Public Worship Act, the aforesaid declaration would be of no value at all. It would be regarded as *ultra vires*, being made by the temporality alone, without the consent of the spirituality: and, therefore, not altering the nature of the question one iota.

Among the important results of the above-mentioned decision may be mentioned the action taken by the Bishop of Rochester. His Lordship has very decidedly forbidden any further destruction to the interior decorations of St. James' Church, Hatcham. It is said that almost immediately upon the late decision of the Court of Queen's Bench being known, he requested the present Curate in charge to obtain possession of the Church keys from the Churchwarden who had been directing the acts of sacrilege which have taken place there. Indeed the proceedings of these violent men remind us of the wanton destruction of Church property by the Puritans in the days of Cromwell, of whom they have shown themselves to be most worthy successors! It would hardly be believed that the said Churchwarden has contemplated the appropriation of the offertory to the purpose of paying for a faculty for removing the interior decorations! The Bishop has forbidden any portion of it to be used for that purpose.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

THAT particular feature of the character and mission of the Baptist which indicates him as the immediate herald of the King of Glory, renders the commemoration of his life and labors peculiarly appropriate for this Sunday. The entire voice of the Church to-day is: "The Lord is at hand"; and the testimony of the Baptist as to himself was: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord." He came in the spirit and power of Elijah. The Jews of that day had studied the prophecy of Malachi, who had declared that before the great and terrible day of the Lord should come, He would send Elijah the Prophet to turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the Just One; and they expected a literal fulfilment of the prediction. They believed that Elijah the Prophet would personally re-appear on earth before the Advent of the Messiah; forgetting, or rather not perceiving, that Malachi alluded to the appearance of Elijah before the coming of the "great and terrible day of the Lord"; and doubtless the prophecy will be literally fulfilled before the Second Advent. Although it might be urged, in opposition to this interpretation, that such an appearance does not seem to be alluded to in the Book of Revelation; and it is not the custom of the sacred writers to express a later revelation of the same event in more enigmatical terms than a former one.

That a Messiah should have a forerunner or herald at all might seem remarkable. We might imagine that our Saviour would be

best able to introduce Himself, and that one who was inferior to Him would be most inadequate as well as most unfit to herald on this earth the coming of Him Who is the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible. The arrangement, however, appears to be very much in harmony with the usual mode of God's dealing with men. Great truths and great blessings are most frequently heralded with some kind of preparation. Prophecy and St. John the Baptist were both of them employed in preparing the way of the Lord. Prophecy trained the minds of men up to the general principles to be enunciated on and in the appearance of Christ, and when He came St. John was there to point Him out. In some respects St. John in the kingdom of grace may be likened to those gifted men in the world of practical life, whose aspirations and whose train of thought are in advance of the age in which they live. They are, in grace and nature; the lofty mountains whose summits the sun has already lighted up, while it has not yet risen on the plains beneath. The practical discoveries of which every one will proclaim the high importance in another generation, these advocate now amid the discouraging criticisms of friends who advise them not to risk their capital upon a wild venture. The social improvements or the public reform which no one will think of challenging when it has become at no distant date law or custom, they plead for now when it is denounced as reaction, novelty, innovation, or revolution—when perhaps it is generally unpopular. Many such men repeatedly present themselves and sometimes in the same generation. They abound in literary, professional, political and commercial life; and sometimes they are to be found in the Church. For however stable and fixed may be the organization and the truths which she is intended to spread and to enforce, yet in the various modes of their application to the constantly changing aspects of man's requirements, new developments are constantly arising. And these instances may be regarded as illustrating the law of God's Providence. Rarely does He so take us by surprise as to dispense with some preparation for what He is about to teach us or to do for us. There are indications and hints, more or less plain, of His coming work and of His will. We see signs of the Son of Man, whether in the course of events or in the intellectual heavens—we see the streaks of dawn which tell of the coming day. And happy are those whose spiritual sight has been so enlightened as to discern the signs of approaching good and to turn aside from the infinite number of counterfeits—the false Christs and false Prophets which are continually forcing themselves upon our attention.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

THE Day on which the Son of God became the Son of Man must ever be remembered, in the history of man, as one of the most remarkable as well as one of the most deeply interesting which has taken place; and its annual recurrence may well be

be looked forward to with a satisfaction and pleasure the most intense. All the sympathies of our nature are gathered around this central point of attraction; and we find all the more genial features of humanity largely expanding in the contemplation of the subjects the event suggests. The good will of God to man is abundantly shown in all the works of nature and of providence; but how much more abundantly in this His greatest work of grace—the gift and incarnation of His Blessed Son, Jesus Christ our Lord! And the song of the angels, in the hearing of the shepherds of Bethlehem, furnishes a theme for our devout contemplation of the glorious results of this most precious gift. By it, the glory of God is shown forth resplendently in the exhibition of perfections and attributes, which must have been unknown in the Heavenly world itself from all eternity. For where could mercy have found a place in those pure realms of light and truth? And in the regions of perdition, justice dire and awful has ever reigned supreme. By this manifestation of Divine love, peace is shown on earth to men of good will; or as we generally read it, "Peace on earth, good will towards men." Peace was thus proclaimed by celestial messengers from Heaven on the Advent of a Messiah, peace was the gift He labored to bestow while He sojourned on earth; and at His departure, when He ascended up far above all Heavens, peace was His last, His best, His greatest blessing. And herein was the richest expression of His good will to man, the most profound manifestation of it, and a means the most effectual to secure it.

The annual observance of so hallowed a day as this has been kept up in the Christian Church from very early times; nor was there any question in the first ages as to the day of the observance. Doubts were raised in after times respecting it, but the twenty-fifth day of December is that which has the earliest as well as the most general claim to be received as the day of Christ's nativity. Some have supposed that the shepherds would not have been in the fields at this season of the year. But to this it has been replied that had the event taken place in the summer season, the shepherds would have been further from the town, whereas if it had been in the depth of winter, they would not have been in the fields at all; so that no argument can be drawn from the season of the year against the fullest confidence in the day the Church has observed from very early times indeed, in celebration of the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is of some consequence that we feel a measure of satisfaction in the time that has been fixed upon for celebrating this event. It will aid us very considerably in the interest we feel in it, and in the warmth of our devotion in the services of the Festival. But it is of infinitely more importance that we accept the provisions that have been secured to us by the coming of the Saviour, and that we cultivate the dispositions most suitable to so great an event in the history of the world. Sacred to the present season are the virtues