

ALBAN, A TALE OF VERULAM.
CHAPTER III.—A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION.

Alban most punctually obeyed his father's last commands. First of all he chose a little knoll, not far from the highway, which commanded a full and uninterrupted view of the meadow, and there laid him in the tomb; over it he raised a lofty pyramid of white marble of Liguria; this he surrounded with a belt of dark cypress. Thus the monument was conspicuous to the whole neighbouring country. Alban ever gave it a look as the last light of evening fell upon it, and as the early tints of morning first made it visible.

In the next place, as soon as the cares of settling his father's affairs were over, he entered upon the enquiry. It served to divert his grief at the same time that he was performing a duty. He unrolled the volumes of Philosophers which he had brought with him, and studied intensely their writings down from Plato to the latest Platonist. Never were they pursued with greater eagerness after conviction; and yet, when he rolled up the last volume of the last author, and summed up in his mind all that he had acquired, he found himself come back exactly to the spot whence he had started; and the end so much desired, the remedy against the bitterness of death, although offered by all of them, was quite as distant as before. The very utmost he could attain to was a picture of hope, not a substance of belief; and the outline even of that picture was very imperfect, and its colours faint: there was nothing in it definite. It seemed a different subject at different times and in different positions.

Angry and disappointed at his ill success, Alban allowed a morbid disgust to take possession of him.—He blamed the Gods for having brought him into life for the mere purpose, it would seem, of making him taste of the bitterness of death. He felt himself to be a mere lump of matter animated at their caprice, and for their amusement. As soon as they were satisfied with the enjoyment of the spectacle which he exhibited, he was to be dismissed to his former state of lifelessness.

Now it was that he felt most sensibly the want of a friend to whom he might impart his perplexities, and by sharing them, alleviate their burden. But in this far distant province, one who could perform such an office towards Alban, was not to be found. The youth of the colony, however he might enjoy their society as companions of amusement and exercise, were quite unqualified to take a share in his studies or meditations. The old were quite as impracticable; they were veterans, who had gained their share in the country by their own good sword, and laughed with scorn at the very name of philosophy. Paulinus, Suetonius, and Agricola were they who for them had discovered the great end; and perhaps their discovery was really more valuable than all the rambling and fruitless fancies of Plotinus and his fellows, upon which Alban was engaged. Aware of what an answer, if any, his enquiries would meet among his friends, he kept his studies secret, and the seclusion, demanded by custom upon the death of a father, effectually shielded him from all interruption.

He had reached the very pitch of this uncomfortable state, and his perplexity was extreme, when one evening he went into the chamber in which his father had breathed his last. He surveyed the bed with tears, and then sat down in the very chair which he had occupied by his side in his last moments. He went over in his mind once again the objects of his enquiry. Disobedient man—just God—the certainty of retribution—the inefficiency of repentance, or of any other means devised to avert the arm of divine justice—the life to come, all these were revolved in his thoughts once more; until wearied and disgusted with the endless perplexity, he rose up and took his station at the window, just as he had done on the evening before his father's death.

It was the very moment of sunset; he saw the fiery orb make a plunge, as it were, and sink into the region of darkness—but only to return in glory. Happy sun, cried he, who daily diest but to live again, canst thou tell me the secrets of the chambers of death, and of the regions which are beyond this diurnal sphere? He had scarce uttered these words, when he was startled by the sudden re-appearance of the figure which he had seen on the night preceding his father's death. It was moving in the dusk along the highway, in the same solemn manner as before, and when arrived opposite the window, looked up as before, but, if any thing, with a look of increased tenderness and interest.

Alban was precisely in the mind to follow the invitation, and scarcely needed the recollection of his former resolution. He rose up, and came upon the highway just in time to see it turn off the road into a bye-way. He hastened along, and entering a deep and narrow lane, saw the figure moving on before him; keeping it in sight, he advanced cautiously, taking advantage of every turn to disguise the pursuit. A wild open heath now presented itself, and across this he tracked the figure, which never once cast a look behind. The shades of night had now come on when they entered a wood; here he could follow more closely without hazarding detection, but at the same time it was more difficult to keep sufficiently in view the object of his pursuit; every instant the chase became more perplexing. Sometimes he completely lost sight of the figure; at other times he came suddenly, with a rustle of the underwood, so close behind, that he wondered how he did not create alarm. The wood seemed interminable, and became more thickly entangled, until at length he came all at once upon a wide open glade.

The moon was now shining forth with exceeding brightness, so that every object stood out with the distinctness of daylight. In the centre appeared a Druidical altar of enormous size, and around it was a circle of cells; but to his astonishment they were deserted, roofless, and ruinous. A belt of gigantic oaks girded the sacred inclosure, but they were quite destitute of the usual decorations; not a mark presented itself of any present use of the spot for sacred purposes. On the contrary most conspicuous were the signs of disuse and neglect. Melancholy are such sights; they tell us that not only whole generations of men, but also entire modes of thinking are passed away, and throw us to a long and obscure distance from the former tenants of the spot. Here, however, the desertion could have been but recent, and struck Alban with extreme surprise. But he had little leisure to reflect upon these strange proofs of the neglect of the patriotic and proud and enthusiastic Briton towards his national rites, for the figure was fast gaining ground. Another long and intricate maze of the forest was threaded through, and the very brightness of the moonlight, falling capriciously through the thick bowers which rose overhead, and giving, by contrast, a double obscurity to the greater part which lay in shadow, rendered his pursuit more difficult. At last the figure stopped.

It was in the very deepest and most tangled recess of the forest. Overhead the boughs of spreading oak, thickly interlaved, formed a screen impervious, it would seem, to any outward influence of night or day, of sun or moon, of heat or storm. Around was a dense thicket of brambles, which in this sheltered spot never

dropped their leaves, but formed throughout the year an impenetrable screen, save through a narrow winding path, which Alban would never have discovered, had he not seen the figure glide in.

In the centre of this inclosure he dimly distinguished a rude low structure, into which the figure appeared to descend. A light gleamed forth from the opened door into the night around, and momentarily gave to view the surrounding trees. It shone full in Alban's face, and he caught a momentary view of many heads within.—His curiosity was now raised to a great pitch; he immediately went up, and sought about for some loophole through which he might obtain a glimpse of what they were doing within. On examining it, he found the building to be a spacious hut, rising not above five feet from the ground. The floor within was therefore deep below the surface. Its walls were composed of rough un-mortared stone, and its roof was so covered with a coat of fallen leaves that it was impossible to make out its materials.

In such a structure it was not difficult to find the chink which he was searching for. He saw that the place was full of men and women, all arranged in the most decent order, one sex on one side, the other on the other of the room. A lamp hung from the centre, which threw a clear light over the whole assembly. He was now convinced that he had detected an assembly of Christians, whom Diocletian's persecution (although as yet much mitigated in Britain) had driven with their rites from towns and cities into deserts. His first impulse was immediately to return and inform Bassian; his curiosity however prevailed, and he determined to witness as much as he could of their practices. At the further end of the room appeared a group standing round a large vessel of water, and close by it the figure which he had been following. He could but dimly descry the features, yet was again struck with the notion of their being familiar to him.

Into the arms of this person a baby was now placed. Immediately there occurred to Alban's mind the horrible stories which had been told of these Christian assemblies; how they murdered children, and made a cannibal banquet on their remains. What then was his horror when he saw it plunged under the water. He was starting to rush to its rescue when he saw it taken out, and, after a few rites being performed on it which he could not understand, restored to the arms of its nurse. The group now broke up, and the old man, whom he had followed, went to the opposite side of the room.—There he knelt for a long time before a table which was covered with eating and drinking vessels.

Again there occurred to his mind the accounts which he had heard of the intemperance and debaucheries of these nightly meetings. Yet, if such were going to take place, the preparation was most strange. The old man was evidently praying with great earnestness, and at times the whole assembly chimed in with his prayer, or responded to it in sounds of most affecting melody.—At last the man of prayer arose, and then, standing with his back to the table and face to the people, began to harangue them. Great was the fervour on his part, and deep the attention on that of the people. So animated was his delivery, so clear his voice (which again he recognized) that Alban heard every word. The subject was patience and fortitude under their present severe trials. Much he dwelt upon the forgiveness of their sins by a merciful God through his only Son, and much on the certain assurance of a blissful immortality through Christ. Most eagerly did Alban devote his attention to every word and sentence of this oration.—It professed an attainment of the very object of which he was in search. The conclusion was in these words:

Faint not my brethren, for though the fight be long and weary, the victory is ours. We have a Captain who hath vanquished sin and death, and under whose feet all the powers of this world are laid prostrate. The immortal weapons of spirit can never yield to arms of flesh. Let us arm ourselves with these weapons, and to railing oppose blessing, to cursing praying, to the spirit of falsehood the spirit of truth, to insolence meekness, to ill-treatment patience. Let us not by a moment's impatience of suffering give advantage to the enemy, but in every way approve ourselves his soldiers who conquereth by charity and love. Reverence your rulers, for they are of his ordinance, and cannot smite us but by his leave; then are their blows his lessons to wayward children that he may bring them to perfect obedience. Pray for your persecutors, for your Lord and Master prayed for his. Pray for Augustus and Caesar, who bear the sword, as deputed by our heavenly king. To use the exhortation of the blessed Paul to the Corinthians, be ye steadfast, immovable, ever abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know, O sons of God, vessels of the Spirit, redeemed of Christ, heirs of everlasting life, bliss and glory, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. To Him, who is our resurrection and our life, our hope and our glory, let us now raise the song of thanksgiving, and bless him no less for what he taketh away, than for what he giveth.

This address was shortly followed by certain unintelligible motions and prayers, after which bread and wine were distributed from the vessels. Prayer and a joyful strain of sacred song succeeded; and, just before they broke up, they sang their concluding hymn with such a soul-subduing plaintive sweetness that Alban, in despite of all the struggles of prejudice, felt his heart melt. It ran as follows:—

Though dark the night that lovers above,
And wild the wood with mazes drear,
God holds on high his lamp of love,
And every path is bright and clear.

The Lictor waves his daily rod,
The robber wields his nightly sword,
We will not fear. Our help is God,
His Son, his Spirit, and his word.

What! thought of all our little flock,
Some never shall rejoice in this band?
Lord they are thine. No mortal shock
Shall shake them from their Shepherd's hand.

So, when with all thy glory crown'd,
While Angels shout behind, before,
Thy Son shall bid his trumpet sound,
We all shall meet to part no more.

The strain lingered in Alban's ear for some time after it had ceased. The noise of the breaking up of the assembly awoke him from his reverie, and warned him to run to a place of concealment. He climbed up into a tree which was close at hand, and thence securely beheld the company issuing forth. His heart was moved with deep compassion, and respect too, when he beheld a promiscuous crowd committing themselves to the perils of the night and of the forest; when he saw old men tottering along, mothers with babes at the breast, delicate girls, tender striplings, braving, for the sake of their religion, such severe trials, when not only the robber, but, who was still more to be dreaded, the civil officer and spy hung upon every step. And is it against such a people as this that the mighty Augustus is waging war, and filling the empire with the noise of proclamations! he asked indignantly of himself.

He waited until the last figure had vanished into the gloom, and then descended; and after much difficulty traced his way through the wood, and reached his chamber in a very different mood from that in which he had left it. He could not sleep, so overwhelmed was he with the flood of thought which his night's adventure

had let in upon his mind. He rose with the sun, and walked forth into the fields, endeavouring to put into some order the various and distracting reflections which crowded so incessantly upon him.

(To be continued.)

THE CAR OF LITERATURE.

Literature, as well as science, if it does not go forward, is apt to perish where it stands; or even to lose ground rapidly. But, let us not imagine, that he, who sits aloft, guiding the car; or that the fiery steeds which bear it along; are alone entitled to our admiration. How many unscen are, at this moment, employed, in shaping the various and complicated parts of that divine machinery! How many, in drawing together the fit materials for its structure; scattered, as they are, over the whole surface of the universe! How many, in exploring distant regions, for those great and brilliant dyes, which glitter in the sunshine of peace; and captivate, for a time, our roving fancy! How many faithful and diligent pioneers are now clearing thickets, forcing out precipices, and removing the obstructions, with which time, and neglect, and prejudices, and ignorance, have contributed to impede our progress! How many skilful engineers are planning new lines of direction for our road; smoothing ascents, cutting off angles and useless windings, uniting the yawning sides of valleys, round which we formerly toiled in tedious circuit; and providing, across the hitherto untrodden gulf, a firm and safe passage! How many of livelier imagination, and more buoyant spirits, are adorning the road-side with flowers; dressing out the right and left, in all the fair varieties of nature; opening the landscape to our view; and giving us, at intervals, a prospect of those happy fabled regions; lit up by the gleams of hope and of memory; which please, even at a distance; and charm away the tedium of human life!

The Garner.

CHRIST OUR EXAMPLE.

The Apostles, having once converted men to the belief and obedience of Christ, thought no argument more powerful to persuade them to the practice of all Christian graces, than the example of their divine Master. This they urge upon all occasions, and with this they recommend their precepts and counsels. Particularly St. Peter, (1 Pet. ii.) exhorting all Christians to patience under sufferings, and a constant resolution to endure the most grievous afflictions, and even death itself, for the sake of their religion, a duty which may justly be accounted the greatest and most difficult of Christianity, giveth this reason first, (ver. 21.) For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps. By which reason he manifestly shows that it is the indispensable duty of Christians to follow the example of Christ, and that thereto we are chiefly called; otherwise he could never have inferred from those words, that it was an obligation, incumbent upon all Christians, to be patient under sufferings and adversities, this being but a consequence of that grand and more general duty. However faint we may not doubt of it we are told that, *he who saith, he abideth in Christ, ought himself also to walk even as he walked.* (1 John, ii. 6.) And in another place, *if any man hath not the spirit of Christ, he is none of Christ's.* So that if the command and intention of our Saviour can oblige us, if the sense of our duty, and exhortation of the Apostles can move us, if the desire of union with Christ, and being accounted members of his body can persuade us, we have on all sides abundant reason to apply ourselves to the serious imitation of his most holy example.—*Rev. Henry Wharton.*

FEAR AND LOVE.

In heaven love will absorb fear; but in this world fear and love must go together. No one can love God aright without fearing Him; though many fear Him, and yet do not love Him. Self-confident men, who do not know their own hearts, or the reasons they have for being dissatisfied with themselves, do not fear God, and they think this bold freedom is to love Him. Deliberate sinners fear but cannot love Him. But devotion to him consists in love and fear, as we may understand from our ordinary attachment to each other. No one really loves another, who does not feel a certain reverence towards him. When friends transgress this society of affection, they may indeed continue associates for a time, but they have broken the bond of union. It is mutual respect which makes friendship lasting. So again, in the feelings of inferiors towards superiors. Fear must go before love. Till he who has authority shows he has it and can use it, his forbearance will not be valued duly; his kindness will look like weakness. We learn to contemn what we do not fear; and we cannot love what we contemn. So in religion also. We cannot understand Christ's merits till we understand His power, His glory, His unspeakable holiness, and our demerits; that is, until we most fear Him. Not that fear comes first, and then love; for the first part they will proceed together. Fear is allayed by the love of Him, and our love sobered by our fear of Him. Thus he draws us on with encouraging voice amid the terrors of His threatenings. As in the young ruler's case, he loves us, yet speaks harshly to us that we may learn to cherish ourselves more towards him. He hides himself from us, and yet calls us on, that we may hear his voice, as Samuel did, and believing, approach Him with trembling.—*Rev. J. H. Newman.*

CONSOLATION.

Permanence is the property of the permanent. But how is it with us? our contingencies dissolve and perish, the victims of perpetual decay and change. Life and death, as they are called, which seem at first of contrarious natures, unite together at the last, the one succeeding to the place of the other. The one, originating from corruption, which is our mother, and proceeding through all the changes of corruption, terminates in corruption, the end of life; the other concludes the scene of our afflictions, and oft transplants us to the realms of bliss. I know not if it can justly be entitled death, more terrible in the name than in the substance. Indeed, our reason is most preposterous, our minds most weak; we dread those things which present no cause of fear, and those which we ought to shun we consider as desirable.

There is one life—to look forward to the life above. There is one death—in; for it is that which destroys the soul. All things else, however esteemed and prized by some, are the mere shadows of dreams, the insidious phantoms of the mind. What loss, what calamity have we sustained, if we are translated to a real existence? if liberated from the changes, and the giddiness, and the satieties, and the base extortions of the world, we dwell with permanent, imperishable beings, and shine, like lesser luminaries, encircling in choral dance the one Grand Light. Thou wilt tell me, thy widowhood afflicts thee. Let hope be thy consolation. Thy separation grieves thee; but it is not grievous unto him. And where would be the sweet virtue of charity, if a man, choosing for himself the smoothest path, should leave the more rugged and toilsome way unto his neighbour? What evil can really affect her who, in a little time, shall feel no more? The predestinated day is near. Sorrow is not immortal. Let us not aggravate the lightest woes with ungenerous and ignoble thoughts. If we have been bereaved of the choicest blessings, we have enjoyed them too; to be bereft, is the lot of all; to enjoy, is not the lot of many. Let not that disturb the serenity of our minds, but let this console and animate us. It is reasonable that the better should prevail. Where is thy son, thine Isaac, whom, in exchange for all, he bequeathed to thee? Demand of him those trifling services of love, to lead thee by the hand, to be a slave to thee, and bless him with far greater in return; his mother's benediction, his mother's prayers, and liberty in the realms above!—*St. Gregory Nazianzen.*

HOW TO READ THE SCRIPTURES.

Great danger is to be apprehended of our being attracted and enchained to the study of the Word solely, or even principally, by the beauties of its composition, and by the general character of the sublime and interesting subjects of which it treats; and thus, mistaking delight in its language, imagery, and general contents, for joy in the contemplation of its intrinsic excellencies, and the experience of its saving power. So far is it from being a matter of surprise to me that carnal men are drawn to the study of the Word, and are oftentimes found delightfully perusing and eloquently praising its varied contents; that it is a matter of surprise, and only to be accounted for by its holiness, which respects, and its truths which alarm, why they are not more attracted to a book, which for poetical beauties of every description, for historical facts, touching all nations and all ages, for helps to philosophy in all its branches, stands unrivalled,—excelling all other books in the graces of composition, the quantity, variety, and usefulness of the subordinate information it conveys, almost as it does in the high matters of its origin, its character, its efficacy, and its end. The very mould into which sacred truth is cast, the form it assumes, increases the peril, lest the message of God should come in word only and not in power also; lest the excellency of speech, through our corruptions, should so engross the attention and captivate the mind, as that the subject be forgotten or subordinated; and, while the fancy is delighted and the mind informed, the heart remains, as to any radical and saving change, unaltered and unconverted. The more beautiful, then, and interesting and attractive, by reason of its suitableness to our peculiar taste and habits of thought and research, any portion of the sacred page is found, the greater care should be observed, that we rest not in word only, that we recall to mind the great end for which all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, which is not to gratify the taste, nor to amuse the imagination, nor to improve and elevate the mind, nor to store the memory with images and truths, however gratifying and even useful, but to convert the heart and save the soul by its powerful operation and sanctifying energy, when employed in the Spirit's hand as an instrument to fulfil the purposes of God.—*Rev. H. S. Owen.*

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