

# Dominion Churchman.

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THURSDAY, DEC. 21, 1876.

## FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

We have been dwelling a great deal on the events connected with the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in pomp and glory, as one of the subjects brought before us for our consideration before the Festival of the Nativity of Christ; but we must not lose sight of the fact that the season of Advent is chiefly intended to be spent in preparation for the great Festival of the Incarnation. The second and more glorious appearance of the Son of Man is introduced chiefly in order that the manner and poverty of Christ's first coming may not have the effect of obscuring, in our estimation, the greatness of His Majesty, the divinity of His nature, and the splendor of His future glory. But Advent is essentially a time of fasting and humiliation preparatory to the joy of Christmas.

THE LESSONS dwell on a state of trembling and fear, while they recount the sources of Israel's trouble, and at the same time give promise of release. A trust in the strength of Egypt is denounced; and the calamities that should come upon the people in consequence of their evil deeds are distinctly pointed out. The humiliation and repentance demanded by despising the words of the Holy One of Israel are especially suited to the present time; while the prophet's announcements of mercy point most conclusively to the appearing of Him who is the great God and our Saviour, who shall reign in righteousness, while His princes shall rule in judgment.

THE COLLECT comes down to us from a remote antiquity, being the same in substance with that used in the fifth century. It is more directly a prayer to God the Father, and therefore its application to the season is less evident than is that of the other three. Its adaptedness, however, consists in the allusions to our sins, which made it necessary that an Incarnation of the Divinity should take place on earth for our salvation.

## CHRISTMAS DAY.

We are again brought round, in the steady progress of time, to a contemplation of the central point in the history

of the world, when the Second Person of the adorable Trinity, veiling his Divine nature and his Heavenly radiance, became linked with the lowliness of humanity—when "The Mighty God, The Father of Eternity, became The Son of Man. As the Word of Jehovah, the Resplendent Outbearing of His Glory, The exact Impress of His Hypostasis, He had sent forth from His feet the successive ages of eternity, had made the worlds, had been the medium of communication between the everlasting Father and His creatures, had inspired Patriarchs and Prophets, had occasionally and for a brief space assumed the form of a human being; but now he becomes in very deed, a man—through all time and for ever, the representative of humanity, first in its lowliest humiliation, in all its helplessness and misery, and then in its exaltation. It is indeed to the Birth of Christ that all the Old Testament Scriptures point; and the whole world recognizes it as the single point of history in which every age, every part of the earth's extended surface, every human being has, and ever will have, the deepest interest. In the Incarnation, Earth was reunited to Heaven, and both were made one kingdom of God, as at the creation of the universe. By this event, the separation of man from his Maker was done away; for now One appeared Who in His Own Person was God over all, blessed for ever, and yet was human flesh. Immortal life and blessedness had been hinted at before by the ancient sages, who had dimly perceived something of its existence; but by the birth of Christ, the truths connected with the everlasting blessedness of the saints were illuminated with the resplendent brightness of the Heavenly world, and man was taught to refer all his actions and all his hopes to an endless inheritance of bliss beyond the skies. The songs of Angels had not been heard on earth since the birth of material nature, until the fulness of time had arrived for the kingdom of Heaven to be opened to all the faithful by the birth of Immanuel.

Gladly, therefore, may every Christian welcome the annual return of this, the first of the Church's four great Festivals of the Christian year—Christmas, Easter, Ascension Day, and Whitsunday. If we are taught to glory in the Cross of Christ because the Cross procured our pardon, peace, and ransom from death eternal, we cannot forget that the Incarnation was the beginning, the first step to be taken by Messiah on His entrance into the vale of woe, through which He had to pass, before, in triumph, He could raise His head. We have, for four several Sundays, been looking onward towards the triumph, the exaltation, the manifested glory, while at the same time cultivating humbleness of mind in preparing for the celebration of the infinite descent from the God-head to the man-hood, from Heaven to earth. And now we indulge

in joy and gladness, because we have a more intimate relationship with the Son of God, Who in man's nature, has become our Elder Brother, and has stooped down to our level that he may raise us up to sit in Heavenly places, and become heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

This is a time when we may naturally and profitably cultivate all the innocent pleasures of which our nature is susceptible. A moderate amount of social festivity appears also to be eminently suitable at this season—the pleasures of home, domestic happiness, and the meeting of long separated friends and relatives—these things are fit concomitants with the deeper and more earnest contemplation of the great events bearing upon the destiny of our race, which this festival brings before us. Some self examination is also extremely suitable. We have begun another Christian year, and we may very properly ask ourselves, whether it is to be spent no better than the last, producing no more fruit, and yielding no better return for the privileges that have been granted.

Especially are acts of benevolence suitable means of commemorating this crowning act of the season. If He Who was rich in inheriting the fulness of the God-head, became poor, in order that we through His poverty might be rich, surely there are duties of a similar character we owe to our fellow-men, and which must suggest themselves to us, more particularly when we commemorate the gift of God's only Begotten Son. The multitudes of the poor are increasing among us, as the Dominion becomes more thickly populated; and the claims and necessities of the church, which have never yet been met, are increasing with more than proportionate rapidity. Our Missionary Diocese of Algoma, the red Indians throughout the Dominion, the Widows and Orphans of our Clergy, our own Mission Fund in the several Dioceses of the Ecclesiastical Province, none of these claims have received that attention from any of us, which a proper sense of our duty as Christians would have secured. And what time better than the present shall we find for dedicating our substance to the honor and glory of Him to Whose goodness we are laid under infinite obligations?

## ST. STEPHEN.

Immediately following the Festival of the Nativity of Christ, we are called upon to commemorate the devotedness and death of the first martyr for Christianity, St. Stephen, who sealed with his blood his ardent devotion to the cause of Him Who was born in the stable of Bethlehem. His steadfast devotedness, his deep piety, entitle him to this high honor; as the last two sentences he is recorded to have uttered, show him to have been most closely associated with the Saviour in his sufferings:—"Lord