

A LENT PASTORAL

BY THE BISHOP OF LINCOLN.

In days of old God had many ways of speaking to His people. And so He has now; for God is the same, He is Love, and Love finds many ways of making itself known.

The different seasons of the Church are all of them different ways of bringing home to us the same voice of love.

And so Lent comes around, year after year, with its words of loving warning, and invitation to repentance, or turning back to God, in whatever way or degree we may have wandered from Him. For the ceaseless aim of love is union.

All this winter God has been speaking to us in a very special way through the voice of sickness. There is scarcely a family which has not had this voice of God very near, so that people have heard the hand of death knocking at their door, or next door. And this has been the same for all; for the young as well as for the old, for the young Prince as well as for the old peasant; for with God there is no respect of persons.

This special visitation of God ought to arrest our attention, and may well give the direction to our thoughts this Lent. The thought, then, which I propose that we should all try to keep before us this Lent is the thought, not so much of our Death as of our Immortality.

In the preface to "Dr. Liddon's Tour in Egypt and Palestine," the writer tells us how greatly Dr. Liddon was impressed by the wonderful ruins of the temples and tombs of the ancient Egyptians; showing, as he said, that they held the real business of life to be preparation for death, thus leaving us an example which can only fill us with humiliation and shame.

It has, indeed, seemed to me for some time increasingly clear that some of us, at least, do not look forward as we ought to the life beyond the grave; the life, please God, in Paradise, and then in Heaven. Is it not sadly the fact that the Psalms seem too often well nigh unreal upon our lips, so that it has been lately asked, "Have we not lost the intense joyousness of the Old Testament saints?" "We use the old words still; but have we not lost something of the spirit, though God should be nearer to us now, in the light of the Incarnation, than He was in those early days, and heaven's glory illuminates our path as it did not then?"

It may be well to consider some of the causes of this coldness towards the life beyond.

1. Society has, probably, been more or less chilled by a materialistic philosophy, which has caused some to lose all faith in a living personal God, and led others, without denying His existence, to say they do not know whether there is a God or not.

2. The progress and application of science has in many ways tended to relieve man from the lower kinds of labour, and has opened out to him many new treasures in the world around him, giving him fresh comforts, and pleasures, and opportunities of enjoying the things of this world. Thus pleasure has become an increasingly prevailing motive for many actions; and a life ruled by pleasure easily becomes entangled in luxury and the things of sense, and forgets God.

3. Forgetfulness of God soon leads to acts of sin; and those who are living in sin are afraid to think of the future.

Lent is a good time to think of these dangers, and of any remedies which, by God's help, may save us from them, and enable us to hear God's voice more clearly, now that it is speaking to us so plainly of death, that we may remember our immortality.

I will now mention some considerations, or lines of thought, which may help us to keep the blessed truth of our immortality more vividly before us.

1. *Penitence.* "The sense of immortality is deepened by penitence; for penitence is the sincere exercise of memory upon our past existence, under the guidance of the love of God."

Here is a plain work for Lent, to look into our lives, and see if there is anything in them which makes us afraid to think of death, and of the great world beyond.

It might be well to read over the Office for the Visitation of the Sick in the Prayer Book, in order to see how we ought to examine ourselves as to our faith and our duty towards God and our neighbour, and to consider the use of the special Confession and the Absolution which is there provided for those who "humbly and heartily desire it."

2. *Prayer.* "The sense of immortality is quickened by prayer, for prayer is the voice of the inmost soul consciously speaking to its God."

In Lent we should consider our habits in regard to prayer, whether we give a satisfactory portion of our time to our prayers, and whether they are such as we need. During Lent we should try to give more time to prayers, both in private and by attending some of the special services in the Church. And when we

are there we should take a little extra time for communing with God, asking for guidance in the words of the Psalmist, "Show Thou me the way that I should walk in, for I lift up my soul unto Thee." (Psalm cxliii. 8)

3. *The Holy Communion.* "The sense of immortality is reinforced by such channels of Divine power as are the Sacraments." The earliest Fathers spoke of the Eucharist as "the salve of immortality," "the pledge of eternal health," the hope of the resurrection, "the food of immortality," "the conservatory to everlasting life." (Homily concerning the Sacrament, Pt. I.)

Here is plainly another Lenten duty, to prepare for our Easter Communion, according to the rule of our Church, which says, "Every parishioner shall communicate at least three times in the year, of which Easter to be one."

In doing this we might well keep the Saviour's own words before us, "Whoso eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (St. John vi. 54)

Every Communion looks back to Calvary, and forward to the Resurrection.

4. *The Study of the Bible.* The Bible is the Book of Books to tell us of immortality. It is Christ, "the Lord from heaven," who "hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." "Our life is," at present, "hid with Christ in God." "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory."

The Old Testament tells us how God prepared the world for Christ's coming; the New Testament tells us how Christ came, and how He is waiting to come again. All the way through the Bible God teaches us to look forward and upward. What we want in the present day is exactly described in the Bible when we read of Moses "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt;" "for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." (Heb. xi. 25-27.)

Here, then, is another work for Lent, of priceless value; to ask ourselves what use we are making of our Bibles, and to make a real plan to read a verse or two every day in Lent, and at least every Sunday for the rest of the year. When we read the Bible we can think of that verse of the Psalm (xvi. 9), "I have set God always before me."

5. *Self-denial.* "The sense of immortality is stimulated by acts of self-sacrifice, which kindle into intense consciousness the immortal germ of life, though they may for a while depress, at the bidding of eternal principles, its earthly tenement."

Lent is a time for special self-denial, a time to ask ourselves whether we are becoming entangled in the luxuries of modern life; a time for fasting and for bringing our passions, appetites, and inclinations into subjection to our reason and our conscience.

This year it might be unwise, from the prevalence of sickness, to run any risk by the serious reduction of our food. I therefore dispense all who desire thus to have the Church's authority from the obligation to observe the fast of Lent; but desire that it may be upon the understanding that in some other way they make a real effort to bring their will into closer union with the will of God.

6. *Brotherly love.* "The sense of immortality is strengthened by a genuine love of man as man." Such a love has no heart to dwell upon the accidents of birth, or station, or income, or accomplishments, which overlie the mighty reality upon which alone its gaze is persistently fixed. Has real greatness anything whatever to do with outward circumstances? Will not the poorest cottage, the humblest, most monotonous drudgery of occupation be everlastingly bright in a saintly memory, if that cottage has been the scene, that drudgery the discipline, amid which a predestined soul has been training for the life of Heaven? Let us study the Saviour's own picture of the judgment in St. Matthew (xxv. 31-46.)

7. *Meditation on the Cross of Jesus.* "The sense of immortality prepares for its loftiest triumphs at the foot of the Cross of Jesus; since the Agony of the Divine Victim reveals the price, and yields the measure of the life of the human soul. It is men like St. Paul, who have determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, who have enjoyed in the highest degree the foretaste of immortality."

Let us, then, try to make good use of Good Friday. "If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him."

May His life-giving death be to us in all our efforts after holiness the animating motive, and the sustaining power, which shall lead us on at last to share His heavenly glory. I am, your affectionate friend and Bishop,

E. LINCOLN.

NOTE.—The above quotations are from one of Dr. Liddon's University Sermons in 1865. His Easter Sermons will also be found most helpful on this great Truth.

BRINGING THE BODY UNDER SUBJECTION.

Extract from a lecture delivered in Trinity Church, Durham, Friday, March 11, 1892.

So far I have spoken only of the appetites and their use. There is another aspect of the question without some attention to which the treatment of the subject would be incomplete. I refer to the abuses to which the appetites are subjected. The sense of taste—which was given us that we might be able to discriminate between foods healthful and foods unsuitable—is often indulged till it becomes vitiated, and unnatural cravings for unnatural viands are the result; so, plain and unflavoured diets are made to give place to all kinds of sweetened and spiced meat and drink, at first partially and gradually, but none the less increasingly; till finally we eat and drink from the love of eating and drinking rather than from the need of it; and the natural appetites, forced in the hot-bed of indulgence, produce the fruits of drunkenness and gluttony! It is not enough to eat plain bread, but we must have it toasted, and buttered, too (if possible on both sides), and even then it is rather dry, so we will have some little relish to help it down more easily! It is not enough to have a cup of tea, but it must be strong tea, and not lukewarm at that, but piping hot from the stove, with lots of cream and sugar in it. And even that is not a fit drink for men; so while the ladies take theirs in the drawing-room, we will remain and drink our stronger drinks till we can drink no more! So by and bye we get so used to have our meals served up like this, and to take an occasional snack in-between-times and a little lunch when we feel like eating, that plain, healthy food and drink become insipid to our cultivated palates, and our suffering stomachs must be coaxed, and soothed and petted, so long as they are able to submit at all; and then we dose them with all imaginable and unimaginable nastiness until they utterly rebel, and we, the "unfortunate victims of dyspepsia," are forced to solace ourselves with the hermit's fare of a rusk and a cup of milk! And then, poor hypocrites! we try to deceive ourselves and neighbours by making a virtue of necessity, and wax eloquent upon the unquestionable duty of Christian people to exercise a proper amount of fasting and abstinence, and descend, with wondrous admiration, of the wisdom of the Church in establishing and enforcing the observance of a Lent! Poor fools! Deluding ourselves at first that our capacity is next door to anything; and seeking to delude others at the last that the proper rule should be next door to nothing. When shall we learn to govern ourselves by the law of moderation and expediency, and cease to be the victims of inordinate desire and fond caprice?

You may think the picture overdrawn. I do not think it is; but if it be, the very flavour of exaggeration will help to point the final lesson that I have to teach. Our spiritual appetites should be subject to the laws of moderation and hygiene, as well as our natural ones. There is spiritual gluttony and drunkenness of the worst kind abroad in our churches today! Plain truth and teaching are not enough; we are tired of merely that. True hunger and thirst after righteousness, the best and only rightful, spiritual sauce, are painfully conspicuous by their absence; and so we seek after any kind of intellectual curry that some hot-headed Indian of a preacher will spice up for us, and vary it with a dessert of biblical confectionery adorned and beautified with wreaths of floral eloquence and of sparkling wit. Anon we cry for stimulants—blood, and fire, and vapors of smoke, till by and bye the Gospel is not good enough for food and Heaven is insufficient for delight; or else we pass the gluttonous and drunken stage, and put upon us the sallow garments of asceticism like the Quakers of the seventeenth century, or indulge in dry and godless cant like the Puritan soldiers of the army in Cromwell's time! My brethren, I recognize in this abuse of spiritual appetite one of the terrible and growing evils of the age. Upon one and the same Sunday evening I can enter a church, on one corner of the city street, and see there a preacher gesticulating like a mountebank, and pausing with all the art of a clever orator for the ripple of laughter or the burst of cheering and applause. On another corner of the street I enter a church where so called evangelists are playing with the utmost skill upon the sympathies and imaginations of the audience, by song, by anecdote, by passionate appeal; working upon their emotions with consummate art, swaying them hither and thither by deep toned pathos, and exquisite satire, until the whole concourse are almost frenzied with a spiritual exaltation, and ready for anything from a crusade to martyrdom, while the exciting fires are flaming, but leaving them in sevenfold darkness and despair when they burn out. I pass the threshold of a third church at another angle of the street. Here luxury and perfume lull the æsthetic company, while glorious music floats from organ and from choir, enrapturing the listening multitudes while it trembles on the air, but rendering many of