

Lesson Commentary.

LESSON X.]

[JUNE 4, 1882.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

MARK XI. 2-13.

THE transfiguration was one of those mysterious and sublime incidents in the life of Christ, which put all human philosophy in fault. Why it should be, is susceptible of possible explanation; how it could be, is a problem which no science is able to solve. It was, and remains, one of the unique events in history. It has no parallel either in the wild fancies of mythology, or in the record of actual occurrences. It was on "a high mountain apart" that the marvel was wrought; the marvel itself is equally a high mountain apart, isolated and unmatched in its character and grandeur.

Try to imagine the scene. It is night, and on one of the lofty spurs of Hermon are four men, three of them sleeping and one praying. It is an hour and place of profoundest calm, the silence broken only by the murmur of the wind through the trees, and the subdued accents of the lone one who is wrestling with God. For a time the sleepers slept on, and the praying man prays on, and then comes a change. The form of the petitioner begins to glow with a supernal brightness. The coarse blue garments of the Galilean peasant are bleached into dazzling whiteness. A moment later and two new personages, Moses and Elijah, the lawgiver and the prophet, though long dead, appear upon the scene. The three sleepers awake and look with bewildered eyes upon the strange glories around them. Peter, dazed and overwhelmed, endeavours to rise to the level of the occasion, and with stammering tongue proposes to build dwelling-places for the shining ones; but while he is speaking a cloud wraps everything in obscurity, and out of the misty folds comes a sovereign voice with its declaration, "This is my beloved Son; hear him." Awestruck and afraid, the disciples fall on their faces to shut out sights and sounds too wonderful for them, but presently the touch and word of the Master reassure them. They look up once more; but the pageant has vanished. Only the pale moonbeams fall on the spot

which but just now was aglow with heavenly radiance. The majestic forms of lawgiver and prophet are gone. They see "no man but Jesus only." The hour of ecstatic vision has passed, and Master and disciples take their way down again into the work and worry of a distracted and sinful world.

Two important ends are served by the transfiguration.

I. *The comforting of Christ.*

He was divine it is true, but he was man also. The sufferings of life afflicted him as they do other men. The cold chilled him, the heat scorched him, hunger gnawed him with its raven, thirst parched his lips, weariness compelled him to lag-gard steps, homelessness was as lonely to him as to others. What was harder to bear, he was "despised and rejected of men," and he was not insensible to that fact. The finger of scorn pointed at him, the contemptuous mockery of his claims, the sneer of the cynic, the gibe of the thoughtless, he felt them every one. That he was calm in his endurance was no evidence that he was not keen in his feeling. From the beginning to the close of his ministry, Christ was a sufferer, and in the history of all those years there is but one recorded moment of gladness. There is inevitably some waste of the fibre of manhood under such long-continued fret. And now the culmination and crisis of the trial were at hand. The gloom of Gethsemane was in the air; the shadow of the cross touched his feet. Would he who had borne so much, be able to bear the agony of the garden, and the death on Calvary? To re-invigorate him and prepare him for these last experiences was one purpose of the transfiguration. Luke records that Moses and Elijah "appeared in glory and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." Their spiritual, Heaven-commissioned ministry was necessary to the man Christ Jesus. What they said is not revealed, but it is easy to conjecture that they might so set forth the relation of the crucifixion to the great work of the atonement that even a faint heart might be nerved to any endurance.

Another hardly less important end served by the transfiguration was—