

man, he still ministers unto me in the word of God: together with Rheus of Agathopolis, a singular good person, who has followed me even from Syria, not regarding his life; these also bear witness unto you. And I myself give thanks to God for you, that ye receive them as the Lord shall receive you. But for those that dishonor them, may they be forgiven through the grace of Jesus Christ. The charity of the brethren that are at Troas salutes you: from whence also I now write by Burrhus, who was sent together with me by those of Ephesus at Smyrna, for respect sake. May our Lord Jesus Christ honor them; in whom they hope, both in flesh and soul, and spirit; in faith in love, in unity. Farewell in Jesus Christ our common hope.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

FAMILY SERMON FOR THE FESTIVAL OF CHRISTMAS.

MATTHEW x. 5.—“Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?”

This was the pathetic message of John the Baptist to our blessed Lord, when forlorn and deserted he languished in the cheerless confinement of a prison. “Art thou he that should come?”—if so, why am I, the servant of God, the forerunner of his incarnate Son, still persecuted with unmerited cruelty; the unhappy sport of a fickle tyrant? Am I to hope that thou art he whom the prophets have announced as coming to “bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty of the captives?” Oh! then “let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoner come before thee—break this yoke from off me, and burst my bonds in sunder.”

Or “do we look for another?” Must we turn away our dejected eyes from that ray of heavenly light which had begun to cheer us in our despondency, and be once more agitated by the vicissitudes of that “hope deferred which maketh the heart sick?” In our distresses and our wretchedness, are we to look for another Helper and Comforter than Thee—whom thy works proclaim to be “one that is mighty to save:” a “very present help in time of trouble?”

This, however, is a more literal paraphrase of the language of the venerable Baptist; for his motive in sending this message was not probably such as the more obvious signification of the words would denote. The commonly received interpretation is, that he put this question to our Saviour, not because he himself had any doubt concerning that illustrious Personage, but that he might thereby confirm the wavering faith of his disciples regarding Him. He probably anticipated, as a natural consequence of this message to his divine Lord, the performance of such miracles and wonders in their presence, as would clear up every remaining doubt, satisfy every scruple and establish their conviction that Jesus was the Christ.

We may, nevertheless, adopt the former interpretation or paraphrase, from the value of the practical application to present Christians which it suggests.

“Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another,” may be the language of some, even now. Reviewing the long list of their transgressions—distracted by the afflictive memory of the past, and tormented by the awful prospects of the future—they are ready to exclaim, “Ah wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

“Thanks be to God,” we may add in the triumphant words of the same Apostle, “which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Once more we have arrived at the anniversary of that happy period when angels proclaimed the birth of the “Saviour which is Christ the Lord.” Once more we hail, with joyful voices and grateful hearts, the entrance of the “Prince of Peace” into the world; and join in the glad song of the heavenly host, “Glory to God in the highest; and on earth, peace, good will toward man.”

There was a time when “the earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep.” Then the Almighty was pleased to issue the mandate of creation: soon this beautiful world sprang forth into existence and order; and viewing the magnifi-

cent work, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.”

There was a time, too, when this chaos of gloom reigned in the moral world—when sin and superstition held tyrannic sway over the unhappy race of man. Then was God, in his goodness, pleased to call forth light out of darkness and order out of confusion; “He pitied us in our low estate:” the “spirit of God moved upon the face of this deep” of human misery and blindness; and the “Sun of Righteousness” broke forth to illuminate and rejoice a wretched world. In the “fullness of time, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman,” “to comfort all that mourn, to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion; to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the Spirit of heaviness; that they might be called Trees of Righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.” He came in meekness and lowliness—he appeared not in “king’s palaces or in soft clothing,” but “wrapt in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” For him “no room could be found in an inn.”—His divine glory filled the universe with its radiance, before whose awful presence angels bowed and whose eternal praises seraphs sang, was not allowed the comforts of an humble cottage nor the shelter of the meanest human dwelling. The birth of this lowly but heavenly babe was announced by no cries of a human herald. The entrance of the “King of kings and Lord of lords” into the world did not meet with the loud acclaim which greets the birth of earthly princes—no hymn of human triumph sang the joys of his advent—no public acclamations testified the happiness of his coming. Yet his own celestial attendants—the bright seraphs who compass the throne of God—proclaimed the glories of this new-born child. They announced him as “a Saviour, Christ our Lord;” whilst his angels and servants thus proclaimed his power, “O! death, where is thy sting; O grave, where is thy victory!”

Thus came “the desire of all nations”—the “consolation of Israel, the trust of the Gentiles.” The former at this time, in anxious expectation of the fulfilment of this prophecy; “and thou Bethlehem in the land of Judah art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel;” whilst at this time also, “wise men came from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews?” This heavenly sovereign, the former hoped, would release them from the bondage of a foreign yoke: to him the latter looked as the “day-star of peace,” at whose appearing the “wolf would dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid: when the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice-den.”

He came to erect a spiritual kingdom. He came to “have victory and to triumph against the devil, the world and the flesh”—to burst the galling bonds of superstition—to dispel the gloom of ignorance—to open to a lost and guilty world the never-ending blessedness of heaven. He comes to assure us that “our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” He came to tell the faithful and obedient that when this earthly house of our tabernacle shall be dissolved we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” He came to be the consummation of this consoling doctrine; “if any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins.”

Of this illustrious person will any, therefore ask, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” Will this be the language of the drooping disciple whom grief depresses, whom disappointment and calamity have bowed down to the earth? Will such be the querulous words of him whose “heart is pierced through with many sorrows,” and whose spirit sinks under the weight of complicated ills? Go, child of misfortune, go to Him. Seek him with earnestness—ask for him with sincerity. Leave, for a season, the world and its unstable consolations—turn away from earth’s anxieties—rest thy faith and hope on God alone—pour out to him thine inmost soul in prayer—strive with the fullest purpose of thine heart, to be his, yes, altogether his; and then examine into the change of thy condition. The gentle dew of his inspiring grace will steal into the deep recesses of thy soul; and soon, all

* Compare Isaiah xi. 6—9 with Virgil, Ecl. iv.