

tedness of mind—a spirit bent without desecration on what was coming. The Sunday afternoon tea-table is a very bad place for these devotional conditions. Those who press the subjective qualifications as the main thing in the sacrament ought to be the last to encourage arrangements which almost forbid their presence. An earnest communicant can always find the way to be present from time to time in the morning. Communicants that are not in earnest had better stay away from the Lord's Table until by God's grace, they become so.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE Festival of the Epiphany, which the Church celebrates on January 6th, is of far more importance than many people seem to imagine. The high value set upon it by the Church is evidenced by the fact that it gives a name not only to the Festival itself but also to several Sundays in succession; and it may be regarded as the complement of the Festival of the Nativity of Christ with which indeed it is closely connected. It commemorates the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, and it not only brings to our notice one of the most beautiful instances of our Lord's infant life; it asserts one of the most fundamental and vital facts of Christianity, and one which marks pre-eminently the great distinction between Christianity and Judaism. The Jewish religion was the religion of a race. If a man was born of the seed of Abraham, and was circumcised on the eighth day, he was in covenant relationship with God. If he were Greek, Roman, or Scythian, he was a stranger to the covenant of promise. Under the most favourable circumstances he could only attain to a kind of outward connection with the religious system of Judaism, as a proselyte of the gate. But after the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, the great Apostle to the non-Jewish races asked, almost indignantly, whether God is the God of the Jews only, and whether He is not the God of the Gentiles also. As if he had asked, Was this religion of Judaism a full unveiling of the mind of the common Father of the human family? Was His eye ever to rest in love and favour only on the hills and valleys of Palestine? Was there never to be a place in His heart for all those races which lay east and west and north and south of the favoured region? Was the God of Israel like the patron deities of the heathen world, the God of Israel in such a sense that Israel could monopolise His care, His protection, His love, while the world would lie in darkness and the shadow of death forever, with no hope of being enlightened by His countenance, or admitted to share His embrace? It could not be; for the Jewish revelation contained the reason of its vanishing by what may be termed an absorption into the brighter light which should succeed it when the Sun of Righteousness should arise with healing in His wings. Judaism considered as a religious system, read the sentence of its own merging into a higher, and better, and more glorious institution when the Messiah should come. This sentence was traced by the hand of its greatest seers and masters. "All nations," said one, "whom Thou hast made shall come and worship Thee, O Lord, and shall glorify Thy name." And the prophetic message to Messiah said:—"It is a light thing that Thou shouldst be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to preserve the restored of Israel. I will also give

Thee for a light unto the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation to the ends of the earth." And again:—"Thou shalt be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles: in Him shall the Gentiles trust." These anticipations, we must perceive, were not realized, when during the two or three centuries that preceded our Lord's coming, educated Pagans at Alexandria began to take a deep speculative interest in the Jewish religion, and to see in it a higher truth than they had known before. The first decided step towards the fulfilment of the language of David and Isaiah was made when the Magi, the wise men from Parthia, who for ages had represented the current wisdom of the Eastern world, crossed the desert on their visit to the manger of the infant Jesus. They were looking out for some great deliverer, some Saviour from evils of which they vaguely felt the presence, without being able to define them. Ancient historians tell us that a rumour was current in men's mouths, throughout the East, of the approaching appearance of the Great King; and this rumour would gather strength from the vague longings for deliverance which half unconsciously were widely felt in the heathen world. The visit of the Eastern Magi opens nothing less than a new era in the religious history of the world; and we Gentiles of to-day, who assemble in His temple to worship our Divine Redeemer—we owe all that we have received from Him hitherto, all that we hope from Him in the time to come, and in the eternity beyond it, to Christ's light—these Kings of Orient to the brightness of His rising.

APOSTOLIC PREACHING.

PREACHING is not an *end* but a *means*. With the apostles it was evidently a means by which the mouth of man might be guided to proclaim to his fellow creatures the whole counsel of God. God ministers are sent, as the Father sent the Son, to preach the gospel,—to preach Christ. To preach is to teach, but to teach what?—the gospel. Preaching is for the plain proclamation of the good tidings, not for the obscuring of the simplicity of Gospel truths.

The preaching of the New Testament is terse, pointed, and bold. To gain the public ear and guide the public Christian life; Christ crucified and the gospel of the kingdom, must be the preaching of this nineteenth century.

Brilliant oratory is a rare gift. Few preachers possess it. The strained and heated rhetoric which is its counterfeit, sits as clumsily upon the average pulpiteer as did the armour of Saul upon the stripping David.

It is perhaps necessary to observe that the authors of the several books of the Bible did not address themselves to rented pews. Terseness, vigour, and point, are the pebbles from the brook which all men may gather, and which sink into the densest brain. The essayism of the safe preacher and the Bible and water, or as Mr. Spurgeon calls it, the "gospel of hum-drum," are equally to be avoided. Let the Englishman's English be English. It is worse than useless to follow the example of the preacher who began his address, "Our Lord did not indulge in nugatory predictions," or "I mean to strike, this evening, the key-note of expostulation." A learned discourse on the comet of 1881, or the transit of Venus, is not a *sermo*. Such may please the fastidious taste of those highest rented pews which

have the nearest access to the polished speaker. Hungry souls need simpler and more digestible food. It is really a waste of time to attempt any improvement on the simplicity of gospel language. All that can be gained will be the flattery of the sycophant who complemented the maker of a very eloquent prayer with the words: "Brother, you improved to-day somewhat on the Lord's Prayer." Apostolic preaching will set forth in unadorned simplicity and virgin splendour, the glorious facts of the gospel of the kingdom.

We have as models some apostolic sermons. The first Christian sermon, and the most effective, was that of St. Peter upon the day of Pentecost. We have also in the thirteenth chapter of Acts the only recorded sermon of St. Paul. Careful analysis of these exhibits, an earnest appeal to repentance and faith, founded on no abstract statement of the dealings of God with the individual souls of men, but upon the love of God, manifested in the glorious facts of the preservation of the Jewish Church, the Incarnation of God, the Maker of all things, His life on earth, His work, His Passion and His death (Acts. ii. 22, 23), His Resurrection and Ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost.

A similar sequence of historic facts, is found in the Epistles. Doctrine must be taught as the Bible teaches it, not in abstract propositions however logical, but as the necessary result of faith in Jesus Christ, the true foundation of all practical piety. We hear discourses in which the *-ations* and the *-isms* occupy the chief place.

Apostolic preaching was the proclamation of the objective facts of God's gracious dealing with mankind. If preaching is to-day an acknowledged failure—if the pulpit of our time brings all too few to the feet of Jesus—it is not because preaching is not a divine ordinance, but because the plan of modern preaching is so seldom in harmony with that of the New Testament. Truth is to be set forth. The best possible mode, and that on which we may most reasonably expect God's blessing, will be the mode adopted and revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in the Bible. Not that we desire the total suppression of all preaching on abstract doctrines. We would have even those which have been so sadly perverted, conversion, justification, sanctification, assurance, &c., set forth; but, if the multitude is to be reached; if sermons are to teach—abstract doctrines must, after the manner of apostolic writers and preachers, be relegated to a back seat, and the glorious facts of the Gospel must supply the ordinary ground for pulpit utterances. Who, in many a weighty and eloquent sermon of the day, can trace a likeness to the simple setting forth of the facts and all its direct issues, of the Incarnation of the Son of God, as exhibited in the Apostles' sermons? Given the outlines of the sermons of St. Peter (Acts ii.), or of St. Paul (Acts xiii.) and how would the modern popular discourse fill up? The Christian character that has been built upon abstract doctrinal systems, such as those of Calvinism, Methodism, or Puritanism in any of its forms, is hardly a delightful one to contemplate. Long practised in that most dangerous of all habits—introspection, the disciples of these schools may be; but they are found wanting in those qualities which the steady contemplation of the facts concerning Christ, is sure to cultivate, namely, forbearance, forgiveness, and child-like humility. We do not say that a bare historical faith is to be commended; but true apostolic preaching well set prominently forward, year by year and century by century, the undying records of the facts of the Gospel story, urging feeble, sinfu