

## THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

A SERMON BY REV. W. AITKEN, MINISTER OF UNION CHURCH, SMITH'S FALLS.

"Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."—MATT. VIII. 11.

In the portion of this chapter immediately preceding, we have an account of the truly interesting circumstances under which these words—the words of Him who spake as never man spake—were originally uttered. Our Lord having entered Capernaum—one of those doomed cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, without availing to bring them to repentance—his kind interposition was besought by a certain centurion, on behalf of a servant of his who was lying at his house in extreme distress. To this appeal to his mercy the Saviour with compassionate promptitude replied, "I will come and heal him." The announcement of this gracious purpose led to a manifestation on the part of the centurion at once of the deepest humility and the most exalted faith. "Lord," he said, "I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only and my servant shall be healed: For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it."

On a certain occasion, when Jesus was prosecuting his ministry in his own country, we are informed that he marvelled because of the unbelief which he there witnessed. Now, on the contrary, the spirit of simple but sublime faith displayed by the Gentile centurion, strikingly contrasting with the grievous destitution of such a spirit among the far more highly privileged Hebrew race, awakened in his breast a feeling of profound admiration, and drew from his lips the language of emphatic commendation—of commendation, how-

ever, charged with reproachful reference to the people whose high privileges had been so culpably misimproved. "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Our Saviour continued as in the text and the verse which follows, taking occasion from the centurion's memorable exhibition of faith unfeigned to foreshow the extension of the privileges of the Gospel economy to the Gentiles, while solemnly forewarning the anciently-chosen and long specially-favoured race of the terrible evils which their inveterate and irreclaimable unbelief would inevitably bring upon them. "I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom (God's once peculiar people) shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The centurion in his wondrous faith was a representative man—the type of a class—a type of those from among the Gentiles who should after turn to God, and acquire an interest in the blessings of the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, through faith in Him who was to break down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, and reconcile both in one body to God by the blood of His Cross—a type of the many who would yet come from the east and west, and at last sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

The form of expression—the *kingdom of heaven*—or the slightly varied form in the parallel passage of the Gospel by Luke—the *kingdom of God*—is used in Scripture