

ALMSGIVING.

THE following story of the Patriarch John of Alexandria, may serve as a comment upon those words of our Blessed LORD. "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

One day, as the Saint went to visit the poor in Cæsaria, where he had caused large temporary lodging places to be made with boards, mats, and other coverings for the shelter of the houseless poor during the winter, several Bishops accompanied him, and among them was one Troilus, a covetous and avaricious man, who spent upon his own luxury and pleasure that which, as a Christian, and still more as a Bishop, bound to be himself an example unto the flock, he should rather have given to the poor. The Patriarch John, who had learned that Troilus had at this time given to his servant thirty pounds of gold to buy for him some very costly piece of furniture, said to him, while pointing to the poor by whom they were surrounded,—"Brother Troilus, love and help the brethren of JESUS CHRIST."

The gentleness of the holy Patriarch's reproof, enforced as it was by the ensample of his own abundant charity, touched the heart of Troilus, and at once astonished and ashamed, he bade his servant distribute to the poor the thirty pounds spoken of, which was done upon the spot. On returning to his house, however, Troilus began to repent himself of such unwonted charity, and yielding to the love of money, and to the suggestions of the tempter, he grew more and more dissatisfied and miserable, until he fell ill of a strange kind of fever, which compelled him to betake himself to his bed; and when a messenger arrived at his house with an invitation from the Patriarch to dine with him, he was compelled to excuse himself as suffering from a violent attack of ague and fever. The Patriarch, on hearing this, understood how the matter was, and in the meekness of the wisdom given him, he rose from table and providing himself with the sum of money given away by Troilus, went to visit the sick man, and after gaily alluding to his donation to the poor, restored to him the thirty pieces

of gold, only requiring from him a written acknowledgment of the same, and a renunciation on the part of Troilus of the recompence he might have hoped for, had he given it freely to the poor. Not a word of upbraiding was spoken by the Patriarch, but with a gay and lively countenance, he rallied the sick man, on having taken in earnest his exhortation to charity, and treating the matter as a loan, and making himself a debtor in the place of the poor, he said, "Because I had a mind to give every one of them a piece of money on this occasion, (it being a festival, and very probably, the festival of the Nativity of our LORD,) therefore, my brother, my almoner not having enough money in his hands at the time, I borrowed it of you, and now here are your thirty pounds back again."

Thus did that wise physician and charitable pastor, as we are told, deal with the fool according to his folly, and Troilus made no difficulty in receiving back again from the Patriarch the repented gift, and at the Patriarch's dictation he wrote an acknowledgment in these terms, "My GOD, recompence, I pray Thee, John my Lord and most holy Patriarch of the great city of Alexandria, for thirty pounds of gold, which he hath given to Thee, returning them unto me."

The cause of vexation being now removed, Troilus found himself delivered from the fever, and as the Patriarch urged him, he rose up and returned with him to dinner.

No more was said about the money, only the Patriarch lifted up his heart in prayer for the unhappy man, and waited patiently until God should make him sensible of his fault, and no doubt Troilus on his part thought the affair well ended, and wondered at the childish behaviour of the Patriarch, in so easily taking the debt back again upon himself; but that night Troilus had a dream, and it was as follows:—He saw in his sleep a palace so large and beautiful, that it seemed to surpass the art of men to build any place that might compare with it. The portal was of massy gold, curiously wrought and over it these words were engraved—"This is the eternal and blessed abode of the Bishop Troilus."