

IV.—THE REAL PRESENCE.

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THE Lord's Supper, in view of the solemn circumstances of its origin on the last night of our Lord's life, the weighty words of its institution, and the prominence it at once and ever since has maintained as a sacred ordinance, is pre-eminently *the* Christian's sacrament. No wonder, then, that its proper significance and efficacy have excited larger controversy and aroused profounder passion than any other institution of Christianity. Yet no doctrine of Revelation should be approached with more self-repressing reverence, or discussed with a gentler, sweeter spirit of Christian charity. Disputants should be careful here not by their sacrilegious violence to rend in pieces the Lord's body afresh. In the primitive celebration of the Lord's Supper, unbelievers and the unbaptized were compelled to retire during the holy observance; and so, for the discussion of this *missa fidelium*, only those are competent who are true believers—who have the quality of positive Christian faith.

The significance of the Lord's Supper rests directly upon our Lord's *words of institution*. Luther called the sacrament "a visible word." That is, the Word alone clothed it with efficacy, and to its exhibition of the Word was due its spiritual force.

The synoptists all repeat our Lord's words in form substantially identical: "Take, eat; this is my body," "which is given" (or "broken") "for you." "Drink; for this is my blood," "which is shed for many for the remission of sin." To St. Paul also a special revelation is given, in which, with some additions, the identical sacramental formula reappears. So remarkable is this fourfold iteration and identity that the latitudinarian Dean Stanley says: "These famous words thus form the most incontestable and the most authentic speech of the Founder of our religion: 'this is my body; this is my blood.'"* The plain, natural significance of these words, so unequivocally expressed and so emphatically repeated, is that in this Holy Sacrament the Lord meant to give to his disciples as the objective elements of a feast of Divine grace his broken body and his shed blood. And it is the question whether he did so or not which is the crux of the whole controversy—the pivotal point upon which all depends.

The only way to escape the natural significance of our Lord's precise and definite words is to resort to a figurative interpretation. It must be contended that He used symbolical language, and therefore did not mean what He said to be taken literally. But it is an established axiom of hermeneutics that a figurative interpretation of Scripture can only be resorted to when the natural one is inadmissible by the laws of common sense. Any other exegetical principle would

*Christian Institutions, p. 95.