

CHRIST'S FIRST WORDS TO HIS DISCIPLES.

A SERMON BY THE LATE REV. JAMES SPENCE, D.D.

"And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day."—John I. 37, 38, 39.

IT is often interesting to trace things to their origin, so as to note their beginnings. This is true in relation both to the works of God and the efforts of man. You ascend the course of a river, with interest marking how its channel gradually narrows as you advance, until, at length, you find its source in some bubbling spring among the hills. You study with profit and pleasure the progress of some great human discovery, which has wonderfully added to our facilities of intercourse or our appliances of comfort—such, for instance, as the use of steam-power: and you go back and back, from one stage of its history to another, until you find it an idea first taking shape in the mind of a Watt or a Stephenson. More interesting, and more profitable far, is it to trace the progress of Christianity, as the grandest work of God in the history of the world. How vast now is the multitude of the disciples of Jesus: here you see Him begin with two. These verses record the first proof or illustration of the Saviour's influence among men. They report the first words of Jesus Christ in His public character to His first disciples. Thrice before His words are recorded. Once to His earthly parents while He was still a boy, regarding His Father's work—Luke ii. 49; a second time to John the Baptist, on the occasion of His baptism, as a word of consecration to His office—Matthew iii. 15; and a third time, on the occasion of his temptation in the wilderness, as a word of victory over the Tempter. Here first we have His word to men as their Saviour drawing them to Himself.

Some fishermen of Galilee, looking for redemption in Israel, had been attracted down the banks of the Jordan by reports of the wonderful preaching of John the Baptist. They came to hear and see for themselves. John saw Jesus on one occasion drawing near to the crowd of his hearers, and he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." The next day he repeated the same testimony, as he saw Jesus walking near. This renewed declaration stirred the souls of two of His disciples—two of these Galilean fishermen—and they left the Baptist and followed Jesus. The word that He spoke to them—His influence over them—and the privilege he afforded them, present a suitable and suggestive theme for meditation. May Christ Himself help us to understand its full and beautiful meaning in relation to ourselves, that those who have followed Him may follow Him more fully—that those who have not yet followed Him may begin from this hour.

I.—*A little real knowledge of Jesus Christ produces the desire for more.*

It was so in the case of these two disciples, and it ever is so. They had heard the testimony of John the Baptist regarding Jesus—evidently had heard it oftener than once, and they received it: "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." It was a wondrous testimony; and they felt it exactly suited to them. They had sin to be taken away, and they resolved at once to seek the knowledge of Jesus, and to follow Him. They prized the Baptist's ministry, for it had done them good, but they felt that the Lamb of God was infinitely more to them than John could be. So now, my brethren, there is no one who really receives God's message regarding Jesus, although his faith should be at first but as a grain of mustard seed, who does not desire to know more of the glorious Son of God. This knowledge is so blessed and so beautiful, so sweet and sacred, so powerful and purifying, so hallowed and joyous, that he who possesses a little truth as his own by precious experience, will seek to possess more. This is the knowledge which makes wise unto salvation. This is the knowledge for the excellency of which St. Paul counted all things but loss. This is the knowledge in which above all others we are commanded to grow. And if we are not growing in it; if we have no desire for more, we may well doubt whether we have ever received God's testimony regarding His Son. There is no knowledge so pure,

so powerful, so joyous in its influence as this, and he that believes that Jesus is the Lamb of God will desire to know more of His transcendent excellency and glorious grace. To know Him is eternal life.

II.—*The true way of reaching and increasing our knowledge of Jesus Christ, is to follow Himself.*

This method the two disciples at once adopted. They might have stayed with John, and asked him for further and fuller information about the Messiah; but instead of this, they left the Baptist, and at once followed the Saviour. And this is the true way of obtaining knowledge of Christ. What can human teachers tell us about Him? They may present the testimony of God fully and faithfully, for our reception: but if we are to know Christ, we must follow Himself. Who can give us instruction about the Saviour but Himself? Who can unfold to us His glory, or reveal to us His beauty, or make known to us His grace, but Himself? Who can tell us what He is, in the glory and mystery of His person, and what He has done in the perfection of His work but Himself?

And how much is there in Him to be known? In this matter the most experienced Christian has not yet attained, or reached a full knowledge of the Saviour.

"Earth is too narrow to express
His worth, His glory, or His grace."

So that we may be ever growing in the knowledge of His personal excellence, and redemptive glory. How much is there to be known of Him, in the majesty of His Godhead, and the mystery of His nature as Emmanuel, God with us? How much is there to be known of Him as the only Mediator between God and man, in the sufficiency of His sacrifice and the prevalence of His intercession? How much is there to be known of Him as the Prophet, Priest, and King of His Church and people? How much is there to be known of Him as the Redeemer of men, the glorious conqueror of Sin and Death and Hell, for all who follow Him? And how much is there to be known of Him as the man Christ Jesus, in all the lovingness of His friendship, and all the tenderness of His sympathy? He has unsearchable riches: and in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

How then can we increase our knowledge of the Saviour, but by applying to Himself, and following Him? Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord.

What is it then, thus to follow Him? We cannot of course follow Him in the sense that those two disciples did; but something of the same principle may be manifested.

There will be attraction. The soul in all its powers will be drawn out after Him and towards Him. These disciples sought the Messiah, and they were drawn to Him. So Christ draws men still to Him, and if we are following Him we shall feel this attraction.

There will be faith—a belief that He is what the testimony of God declares Him to be, and a trust in Him as the Saviour and friend that we need—able to take away all our sins and to save our souls. There can be no following Him without faith. Some followed Him while He was on earth without real faith, followed Him for a time from curiosity or carnal motive; but they were soon offended by His doctrine, and went back and walked no more with Him. There must be faith in order to follow Him fully, faith in Him as the Saviour of men.

There will be submission—a readiness to do what he desires or commands, just as these disciples unhesitatingly and joyously obeyed when in reply to their question, "Master, where dwellest thou?" He said, "Come and see." So we must surrender ourselves to His guidance and influence if we would truly follow Him. To know Him, we must follow Him, to follow Him we must trust Him and obey Him. There is no other way of reaching that knowledge which is the true light and liberty here, and which will be life eternal hereafter.

III.—*The Spirit of devout inquiry always meets with the Saviour's sympathy and smile.*

"Jesus turned and saw" these two disciples following Him; but why did He turn? They ventured on no address, nor any introduction of their own, and were following in silence. But Jesus was conscious in His Spirit that they were following, that the hour was now come when He was to begin to draw men around Him; and He turned and looked upon the two as the first given to Him of the Father. He opened