

everything is sacrificed to the short hay and harvesting season. If seven persons assemble together, divine service is held. Owing to the distances travelled early service is unknown, the usual hour being twelve o'clock. After service the clergyman furnishes refreshments for all of his congregation, the expense coming entirely from his own private purse. As their salary is very meager, a man feeling rich on two hundred dollars a year, this expenditure means true self-sacrifice, even when a pastor is called upon only to feed a few of his congregation each week. Besides his salary, the pastor has a farm and a certain amount of stock given him, whereby he can contribute to his own support. There is one Bishop on the island, and between one and two hundred priests. The Roman Catholic religion was entirely abolished at the time of the Reformation, but the means of communication with other Protestant countries being difficult, changes were made very slowly, so that even now, though all belong to the Lutheran Church, Roman Catholic vestments are still used as in the days of papal power. The sacrament is administered but twice a year, in spring and autumn. It is a very solemn service, for which much preparation is made. Children are always confirmed on Whit-Sunday or Trinity, and on the following Sunday communion is observed. The children are usually confirmed between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, after having been examined by their pastors in the autumn, when all the children of the parish are visited yearly. The law forbids the confirmation of children until they can read the church service and the authorized books of sermons. These sermons are always read at home at twelve o'clock on any Sunday when the family can not attend church. Candidates for confirmation must also memorize the catechism and the contents of a small book called "The Essence of the Bible." During Lent children go once a week to the clergyman to prepare for confirmation, and on the day on which the sacrament is administered the girls wear, for the first time, the full Icelandic costume. On Communion Sunday all the women appear in this old costume of the days of the Vikings.

In this country there is no immorality, little intemperance, no unbelief, no slums, no criminals, no beggars, no alms houses, and no suffering, starving poor. While none are rich, few are so poor as not to be glad to help a needy neighbour. There is a poor-tax, which is used to support, orphans or old people who have been left without means of support, and who are boarded out on some farm. There is now an exception to this thrifty state of affairs. The earthquakes have recently devastated many homes, ruined many farms, and the homeless, suffering people need more help than the Icelanders are able to give them. The appeals in the public press have met with no practical results, neither food clothing, or money having been donated.

#### THE COMFORT OF GOD'S PARDON.

BY GEORGE MATHESON, M.A., D.D.

"Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." (Isaiah xl. 2).

What a strange ground of comfort! Is there not something grotesque about it? To be told that I am pardoned is doubtless consolatory; but to be told that I am pardoned because I have got double punishment is surely fitted to irritate rather than to please. Nay, but it is not the *punishment* God speaks of; it is the reparation. Is there any pure soul that would like to be pardoned without atonement—without paying back even more than he took away? If I have done my brother a wrong, and there come to me a voice through the silent air, "Be of good cheer, it will be all forgiven," would that really give me cheer? Not if mine were a pure soul. I would ask something more than my pardon—the reparation of my wrong. I would ask to pay up—to pay more. I would ask, not only to be allowed to restore, but to be allowed to enrich; not simply to fill the coffers I have emptied, but to place a larger treasure in their room. There is no sweetness in my pardon until I am told that my deed has been washed away.

From Thy hands alone, O Lord, can I receive a pardon that shall comfort, because from Thy hands

alone can they whom I have injured be recompensed. Men speak of Thy forgiving love in redeeming from the fires of hell; but there is no fire so hot to me as the remorse for yesterday. I have injured my brothers a hundred times. Some of them are beyond the reach of my remedy. Who shall make it up to them when they have passed out of my hands? If it cannot be made up to them, it will not be made up to me. Pity will not do it; mercy will not do it; pardon will not do it; love will not do it; heaven itself will not do it. If I have caused eternal pain, I think I would rather have pain than joy. How could I sit beside Lazarus if I knew that I had helped Dives to his seat below? Thou alone canst satisfy me, O Lord. Only from Thy hands can I receive the reparation of my sin. Many of my victims have passed beyond me; but they have not passed beyond *Thee*. Thou holdest all things in the hollow of Thy hand. Make it up to them, my God. Pay them what I owe. Recompense their loss. Compensate their tears. Mitigate the pain which I have wrought them. Nay, better, turn the pain into a glory. If I have sent Jacob to be on a pillow of stone, make it to him a place for angels. If I have driven Joseph into a dungeon, lead him through it to a throne. If I have cast Moses on the rude waters, bear him on their bosom to a happy shore. If I have helped to wound the Son of man, make His cross the world's crown. My pardon shall be perfect comfort when Thou hast redeemed my sin.

#### "THY WILL BE DONE."

"Thy will be done" is often thought of as a petition hard to utter. With it is coupled the thought that it implies a difficult and painful surrender of our own will. We think of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane as with "strong crying and tears" he deprecates the dreadful cup, saying, in deepest agony, but with beautiful self-surrender and submission to the Father, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done."

It is true, indeed, that oftentimes sincerely and submissively to say "Thy will be done" requires of us a great mental struggle, because it may mean the surrender of some object as dear as life itself, or the acceptance of some appointed trial or affliction that taxes our fortitude to the utmost. But instructed by the Lord's prayer to offer this petition and aided and encouraged by his example in the garden we are helped to go forth bearing our cross after Him. We feel that since He has taught us the duty and set us the example, the way is made easier and plainer for us. We also know he will not leave us comfortless, nor suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but with the temptation will make a way of escape, that we may be able to bear it. Nor are we now alone, as He seems to have been in the garden and on the cross. He is with us always, is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows how to deliver us in the time of trouble, or so to sustain us and sanctify it to us that it shall work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

"He knows what sore temptations mean.  
For he hath felt the same."

If ever we are tempted to debate whether it is better to have our own way or to surrender and let God's will be done, the thought that ought at once to decide our minds and comfort our hearts is, that His will is always wisest and safest for us. How sad and perplexed we well might be if God should give us up to have our own way and follow our own counsels! Who that knows of the mysteries and uncertainties of the future, the swift and powerful forces by which he is surrounded, would dare to discard and decline the divine watch and care, and choose the path for his own feet? The greatest security and mercy of our life is that, for the mere asking, we may have the loving, constant, and infallible guidance of our heavenly Father. And especially ought such a privilege to seem dear to us when the way is dark and the clouds run low.

It does not follow that an answer to this prayer will always lead us through some garden of tears, but more often by some other way through a garden of delights. God's will for us is always the best, and it may be also the sweetest and brightest. He does not afflict the children of men willingly, and, when at all, it is for their good. He always does the best for us that infinite love can do, and what better than that can we want? Knowing this, it ought not to be hard for us to say, "Thy will be done."