

churchyard, and thirty years after the inhabitants numbered only six hundred. The amazing increase in the inhabitants may, therefore, be said to have taken place within the last century. Not very long ago the annual value of the land in the parish was esteemed at nearly four millions sterling. Just forty years ago the Church of St. Pancras-in-the-fields, to give the edifice its formal designation, was opened after having been reconstructed and enlarged. The churchyard, long since closed to further interments, contains the dust of many persons of distinction, especially of French nationality. The proceedings on Saturday will no doubt be a source of interest to the descendants of many of those whose existence has long since become a memory only. Such a church, hallowed by the memorials of the past, claims every care, and it is gratifying to be assured that the recent work has been carried out with a conscientiousness and judgement which have given the utmost satisfaction.

THE MESSAGE OF HOPE.

(A sermon preached in St. Paul's Cathedral by the Rev. Canon H. Scott Holland.)

Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given." Isaiah ix. 6.

(Continued.)

If God would only break the silence, if He would only speak, and touch, and cry, then something might be done, there might be relief, for this purpose of His in Christ is too remote to kindle us, too immense to enjoy, too intricate to follow, too hard to embrace, too severe to console. We may strain our eyes in contemplation of it, but contemplation is always cold and loveless. Oh that God would draw near, here and now, that face might meet face, and heart might meet heart, that we might know the warmth of His love and the arms of His compassion! Oh that we might know where we might find Him, find Him at our side, and look up into His eyes and hear His voice! How can we form or define this vast eternal counsel, so shadowy, so distant, so far reaching? How can it advise, and aid, a poor wandering human soul—a tiny atom in this huge system—as it gropes its feeble way along uncertain paths? How can our little place and office be flattered to believe itself to have a part in the achievement of the purposes of God? We cannot sustain our belief on that high level. We cannot seriously assume our own importance and value in the unrolling of the everlasting mystery. We cannot tell what we are wanted for, or of what use to Christ we can possibly be, or how it matters much what we do. Nor can we present this Divine purpose in any intelligible shape to our minds, or in any vivid form to our imaginations, so that it may really illuminate with clear vision the strange, sad, bitter turmoil of human life as it tosses and rears about our feet. So we sigh; and once, therefore, again the great answer is given—"Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given."

God has not only planned; He has also spoken. He has broken that silence in which He worked His secret work; and the sound which He lets loose, the word which He utters, the cry which He sends forth—lo! it is His own Son, that same Son Who is Himself the Eternal Purpose, in which and for which all things were made. The Child Who is the consummation is also the hand reached out by the Father—the arm by which He embraces us. In Him God comes near, and, indeed, His very face shines in upon us; His very voice it is that speaks. No man could see God at any time, and that was our sorrow; and now He, the Son, makes to us the revelation. He is the Light. He Who is the purpose is also the interpretation of His own purpose. Listen to Him; read His

words. How deep He goes! How strangely simple life becomes in His sight, and to His mind! How untroubled He is, how undisturbed, how unperplexed! Here is one to Whom we can willingly commit ourselves, so true He is, so masterful. We bring Him our riddles and the mystery dissolves—the knots all untie themselves. Far and wide, high and deep, His utterances reach, and the confusion takes shape and order as He looks at it; the tumult, the Babel of the earth becomes intelligible, as He reveals His secret. He speaks always as one that hath authority; He speaks always as one Who knoweth what is in man. Nor is it only His words which throw light, which interpret—much more, He is Himself the word; His whole being speaks to us, carries a message, brings us good news of God. This child is Himself the revelation. See Him, and you see the Father; know Him, love Him; and it is the Father whom you love and know; obey Him, and you are loved of God; abide in Him, and lo! it is the Father who enters in and sups with you. Everything from Him is a word from God. Is it His tenderness which draws you to Him? Even so tender is your Father which is in heaven. Is it His stainless purity which holds you enthralled? Even so your Father is pure and stainless. Is it His mercy that subdues your stubborn heart? Even so is your Father merciful. Watch Him, learn of Him, cling to Him, follow Him and you are a child of God the Father Almighty. Oh! the blessed joy to have got the Father so near, so clear, so intelligible, in a shape that the mind can so sweetly handle and the heart so truly love. And look He pledges Himself, pledges His life, just at the point where our faith wavers and relaxes; just where God's purposes seem to languish, to break. Just there He places Himself, He offers Himself to the worst defeat. He is stamped with the print of our shame—the nails, the thorns, the spear, the hate, the contempt, the torture. All these He takes that He may certify to us by His own blood that the purpose of God still holds good, that the love of God in Him is even yet working out its consummation in glory. Nothing is lost, nothing is wasted, nothing is forgotten or despised; all is moved still by a compassion that cannot fail, by a will that cannot break, towards an end that is worthy, towards a fair and definite rest that yet remaineth open to receive the people of God who shall endure unto the end in prayer. Yes, He gives us this pledge of Himself that we may be of good heart when we think ourselves forsaken of God. Following in His steps we cannot be wrong; we do not fear, we have lost the fear; that which seemed a curse now proves a blessing in Him Whose sufferings we too can be brave to suffer. Therefore, "Glory to God still in the highest, good tidings of great joy," because "unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given."

And yet a riddle remains, dark and menacing and cruel. We had asked, "Is there any end to all this human labour?" and the answer came, "A Son is given, the perfect issue, the glad fulfilment; Christ is born. Who is the sum and crown of all." We asked, "How can we know this?" His silence frightened us, "Oh! that God would speak," and the answer comes again, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given." He is the oath that the Father swears by Himself, because He can swear by no greater—God has sworn, once by His holiness He will not fail David, and Christ is the oath by which God binds Himself to bring the great purpose to pass. And yet again there is the weak whisper of doubt at work within the depths of our souls: "Is it enough to know? Is it enough to listen to that great oath sworn?" We may be assured that God is faithful; we may be convinced that His Christ has spoken; we may hear His voice, as He passes over those boisterous waters, saying, "Fear not, it is I, be not afraid." But, alas! we are too weak to be loyal to our own convictions; we

are too broken to walk in the light of the assurance, "Be not afraid," indeed, but the storm is so heavy, and Christ seems to be asleep; the ship creaks and groans, and the planks are starting; can we help being afraid? We have lost nerve; we cannot hold back the panic which shakes us; now and again, as our first faith feels strong, we start to walk to Christ over the wide waters, and there it dies out, and we grow dizzy, and we are sinking, and we cry out in our fear; unless Christ will reach a hand to us we shall be lost.

And, dear people, this last riddle is no disaster at all; it is rather the certain result of having seen the light. Our impotence, our barrenness, our disloyalty, our instability, these now disclose themselves to us because we have seen the light in Christ. Belief assists this disclosure. It does it in two ways: first, by supplying not only a higher, but a definite standard. We may have high ideals before believing in Christ, but with most of us they are too vague to really put us to any proof; they float indefinitely round about our best moments, but never thrust themselves forward sharply into our ordinary work, our every-day feelings. We do not know how sadly we can slip and stumble until we are really in haste to make for a definite goal; belief in Christ sets a hope before us, insistent, urgent, unceasing; it fixes us upon a single definite object, it demands speed and readiness. And now we discover too bitterly our lack of training, of discipline, of care, of zeal. Who would have guessed himself so profoundly unfit? And then, again, before we believe we are apt to attribute all our recognised failures to our want of belief. We feel ourselves lazy, weak, ineffectual, but then we think, "It is all because I do not know what to be at. Oh! if I believe; if I were sure that Christ had died for me, and called me to be His servant! How fervent I should be; how devoted. There is nothing I would not do." So we think, and, so thinking, we pass our easy censure on professing Christians, who, for all their claim to belief, do not seem much better than ourselves—are not more free from failings. "Why do not they carry out their Master's words? Why are they so timid, and selfish and worldly? They ought to be as their Master, if they believed on Him. They ought to be houseless as the birds, blameless, compassionate, consecrated to heroic service, afire with martyrdom." We all are sure before we believe that if we believed we should be saints; but when we do find belief at last, then begins the revelation; we believe, and yet what is it? We stumble so sadly, we slip back so meanly; our faults are more obvious than ever, more menacing, more disheartening; our anxieties, our shrinking, they swarm about us as before, or almost more. How disappointing we are to ourselves—how untrue, how blundering, how passionate, how indolent, how perverse; and the more pains we take the more we seem to fail. And now there is no doubt at all where the secret of all is to be found. It is not the belief that fails, the failure is in ourselves; it is we who are failing in our belief; it is our will that lags so desperately behind our wish; it is our flesh that encumbers so heavily our spirit; it is our passions that climb so mercilessly around our desires, yea, those passions that clamber and climb and entangle and choke us; it is the old man within us, so strong, so selfish, so hard, so deadly; it is sin that is not cast out, and its clutch is still about our throat, its breath is still poisoning us, and its evil hands are not loosed. "Oh! miserable man, now I know myself; now I see myself, in God's sight; now I begin to abhor myself; now I lie low with my mouth in the dust; I cannot do what I would. The light shines, yet somehow the horrible self in me drags me down into the darkness, that darkness which it prefers because its works are evil. I see what I ought to be, and I can never be other than I am; I see what God calls me to do, and I can never fulfil it; who shall deliver