

Family Department.

"TILL DEATH."

(The following beautiful lines were written by the late Dean Stanley.)

"Till Death us part."
So speaks the heart,
When each to each repeats the words of doom;
Thro' blessing and thro' curse,
For better and for worse,
We will be one, till that dread hour shall come.

Life, with its myriad grasp,
Our yearning souls shall clasp,
By ceaseless love, and still expectant wonder;
In bonds that shall endure,
Indissolubly sure,
Till God in death shall part our paths asunder.

Till Death us join,
O voice yet more divine!
That to the broken heart breathes hope sublime;
Thro' lonely hours
And shattered powers
We still are one, despite of change and time.

Death, with his healing hand,
Shall once more knit the band
Which needs but that one link which none may sever;
Till, thro' the Only Good,
Heard, felt, and understood,
Our life in God shall make us one forever.

THE CHRISTIAN'S INVISIBLE HELP.

A SERMON,

Preached by the REV. J. H. S. SWEET, in St. Andrew's Church, Newcastle, N. B., on Sunday evening, Sept. 11th, 1881.

"And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."—II Kings vi. 16.

The lesson afforded us, dear brethren, by the narrative of which the words of my text form a part, must ever be one well calculated to bring comfort and encouragement to the child of God. There are always times, and, of course, at times, pre-eminently such, when we turn to such words as my text to cheer us on in the daily and hourly struggle for what is on the side of truth and honesty—times when, whether we take an extended view of the cause of Christ in the world in the triumphant march of the Church Militant, or a more contracted one with reference to ourselves, and our own heart's conquests, we are apt to despair and despond. We think—and, humanly speaking, is it too much to say that we sometimes feel?—that the world, as represented in its multiform and varied phases of sin, is too much for us; too strong in its opposition to all that is lovely and of good report for us to cope with it either as a Church or as individuals. To the really earnest and zealous worker for Christ there will, at times, come the season of despondency and despair.

Perhaps, for wise purposes, God permits us thus to feel our own weakness that we may be drawn away from trusting to, and dwelling upon, our own strength,—upon human instrumentality. Failure and unsuccess are often fraught with untold blessings. As we are daily made conscious of our own infirmity, of our own inability to cope with the powers of darkness—the principalities and powers of Satan—we are led more and more to lean upon the arm of the Almighty; are constrained, as it were, to take off our gaze from our own little self, and to look for help and support to the King of Kings.

It was a lesson which even Elijah, the Prophet, had to be taught. "I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away." Such were the dismal and desponding accents of his words at a time when he felt himself to be the only prophet of the Lord, and the prophets of Baal far too numerous for him to contend with single-handed. The fact was, dear brethren, that Elijah, in view of the many obstacles that opposed him on every side, was beginning to lose trust in God and to despair. And God taught him then, and assuredly through him, that when we work in His cause we do not work alone; and that, though outwardly and to our bodily eye sight our labour seems all in vain, God may yet, and that through our instrumentality, be working secretly all the time by the still, small voice in the hearts of men. "Elijah, you must remember, had seen the fire come down from Heaven, heard the people confess their God, and slain Baal's prophets; and yet the work seemed all to be done over again; but now he learnt that the quiet power of God's Spirit was working in the people's hearts, and there were 7,000 men who had not done homage to Baal."

Thus did God cheer His servant Elijah in the midst of his despair; and so would God have us speak encouragingly and cheerfully to all His children when, like the prophet, they feel themselves incapable of doing the things that they would. And even to the best and the holiest there come seasons of despair—seasons when we are constrained to ask, "Am I really doing any good in the world? Is there, after all, any use in this perpetual and never-ending struggle against the deadly foes of my soul? Why not give in at once? Have not I cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency? Who

of us—I mean those of us who do earnestly and sincerely wish to please God—who of us have not, in seasons of despondency, asked such questions as these? and if so, you must know how consoling it is at such times to be led from self to God, and to see in His promised aid a power greater than all the powers of darkness which ever seek our ruin! You know how cheering then it is to be reminded that we are not alone, that we have One with us Who is mighty to save, in Whom and by Whom we can be more than conquerors!

Dear Brethren, such comfort and encouragement come to us from the words chosen for our evening text. Truly, we must confess, the revelation here vouchsafed to the servant of Elisha was most marvellous. It reveals to us the spirit world. The curtain that divides it from our bodily sight is here, for a while, drawn aside. God in His great love and mercy, in order to keep us of good courage, now and then reveals to us the angelic hosts which are ever fighting on our side, ever ready to succour us in our time of need. Thus He revealed to the eye of St. Stephen in his dying hour the form of the Son of God in Heaven, succouring him, and ready to receive his spirit. Thus he reveals to us in the Acts of the Apostles the Holy Angels delivering all the Apostles from the prison, and striking off St. Peter's chains, and smiting Herod, the persecutor of the Church at Casarea. And thus also, Dear Brethren, does God reveal to us in the Apocalypse the glorious imagery of the heavenly Host, gathering in the elect of God, and praising God for her victory. Thus also does He reveal to us Christ as the Rider on the white horse, going forth, conquering and to conquer; reveal Him, moreover, followed by armies out of Heaven, also riding on white horses.

And so also in the narrative before us, when the words of my text were spoken, does God reveal the Angelic Hosts which ever encamp about them that fear Him. Irritated and exasperated beyond measure at the repeated failures of his attempts to entrap and ensnare secretly the King of Israel, Benhadad, King of Syria, determined to seize upon and destroy Elisha, the prophet of God, who, as a courtier told him, could "tell the King of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber." Thereupon does the King of Syria send a great force to seize upon the Prophet, who, as we read, was now dwelling in the midst of the ruins of Dothan. The vast army encompass the city on all sides, and, without doubt, made sure of the Prophet, and in the morning Elisha's terrified servant came to tell him of the plight they were in. "Alas! my master," he exclaimed, "How shall we do?" The thought of escape he at once felt to be a hopeless one. He saw only the fearful host of foot, horse and chariots; his eyes could meet with nothing but woods of pikes, and walls of harness, and lustre of metals. He cannot flee from his new master, if he would; he runs to him with a woeful clamour: "Alas! my master, how shall we do?" And the Prophet, what does he do? Do the words of his servant terrify and affright him? Does the thought of the vast army now encamped on all sides of them fill him full of unutterable fear? Not so! He sits quietly and undisturbed in his chamber, confident of succour in the strong courage of faith, and he says to his servant, "Fear not."

Surely that was a strange precept to give to his servant at such a critical time! Surely they had much to fear! What were they (the prophet and his servant) to the vast multitude of chariot and horse which met their gaze, turn wheresoever they might? "Fear not," and this in the face, in the very "jaws of death." "As well might he have bid him not to see when he saw as not to fear when he saw so dreadful a spectacle."

But what says the prophet further? He gives a reason for the strange precept. "Fear not," he says in the words of my text—"Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Still all is mysterious: the prophet's words are still a paradox to the servant. He looks around and he sees on all sides those who are not for them, but against them. What, then, do the words of the prophet mean? Where are they, if, indeed, there be such, which on our side are more numerous than the vast army seen on all sides of the city? The words of the text are a puzzle to the servant; they and the prophet's calmness are bewildering to him. He cannot understand what it all means. And then Elisha prays, and says, "Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see;" and at the prophet's prayer the young man's eyes were opened, and he saw the whole mountain full of chariots of fire and horses of fire, guarding his master,—the oft-quoted emblem of those bands wherewith "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." There is no need to follow up the narrative. It is yet fresh in our minds, having been read to us this evening from the Church's Lectern. We all know the sequel, how, at the prayer of Elisha, the Syrian army were smitten with blindness, and so were dealt with at his will.

It is more especially around the particular words of the text that I would, in conclusion, cluster the words that I have yet to speak. Oh, may the great God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, engraft upon the hearts of us all the appreciation of the words of the text; may the cheering and encouraging lesson therein contained be our support and stay when, in seasons of unyielding pressure, we give way to despondency and despair.

I. And surely, dear brethren, in the first place, we should feel strong and courageous in the fact

that we ourselves are not alone as we fight the battles of the Lord. The same army which fought on this occasion for Elisha, still encamps around them that fear God. It is so, of a truth. God's angels are still near us; guiding us and protecting us from dangers and temptations as surely as they did the servants of the Lord of old. Oh! that we may feel it to be so of a truth.

"Be strong and courageous," so speaks King Hezekiah to his servants when Sennacherib's army entered into Judah. "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid, nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him; for there be more with us than with them." And David sings in the Psalms: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? * * * Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." "What shall we then say to these things," asks the Apostle St. Paul, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Why should not we also, my brethren, use such language of steadfast and confident faith? Though unseen to the bodily eye, the angels of God are still encamping about us and the city of our God. No matter what foes beset us, whether as a Church or as individuals, we can as well use the words of Elisha for our comfort and support as could the prophet himself: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."

1. More with us as a Church than all the leagues of the prince of this world that are set upon its ruin. Oh, how comforting this to those who love God's city—the spiritual Zion! for are there not times when we almost feel that her progress in the world is all too slow and undefined? We look around us on all sides and see the great depths of sin into which mankind is led, and the Church, humanly speaking, appears all too weak to grapple with the surrounding evil. Nay! we see her laughed at and ridiculed by the godless crowd. "Down with it! down with it! even to the ground!" Such is the cry which arises, like their evil perfume, from the dens and caves of infamy and sin. Notwithstanding all her ministry, all her labours of love, all her contrivances for the good of mankind, the fact still stares us in the face that many at this present moment are not only outside of her fold, but, in every imaginable way, hostile to all her holy and heavenly teachings. Turn whichever way we please we see the marks of the destroyer, and we feel as if the Church's work were all too weak and powerless to stem the current of wickedness so conspicuous in the world.

And not only has the Church to contend against the fools who make a mock of sin, and who, as the ribald multitude did of old, cry—"Away with Him, away with Him." There is abroad, especially in this age, a more subtle and soul-destroying spirit which is ruining so many. I refer to the spirit of INFIDELITY. Men of science, falsely so-called indeed, are getting beyond themselves—they cannot understand, much less receive, the plain facts of God's revelation to man. They would, perchance, be wiser than He by whom all things were made. In short, they do not believe in the Supreme Disposer of all things, and so they worship and fall down to the vain theories of their own crude fancies. Christianity, say they, is a failure; it is now an old story; it is now out of date.

Such, then, are some of the evils against which, with all her machinery, the Church of the Redeemer has to contend. On the one hand, she has to break down the spirit of lawlessness, and, on the other, the open spirit of infidelity. And is she sufficient for these things? Ay, Brethren, to our own puny intellects and weak faith, she may appear all too insufficient. Nay, do we not in our despair, sometimes wonder whether she will yet brave the storms that rage around us? But shall we thus despond? "Alas, my Master, how shall we do?" Such is our cry as we see the chariots and horses of the King of Syria besieging the Church of Christ. But, praised be God, she shall yet trample under foot all that now seems to threaten her destruction. To us all comes Elisha's exhortation in the text—"Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." We have on our side the Lord God of Hosts; He it is who is with us as we fight the powers of darkness. The Church shall never fail: her Lord will never leave her, nor forsake her. Yea, have they not—Satan and his emissaries ever since she was first launched on the waves of this troublesome world—have they not ever been seeking her downfall and her ruin? Read her history in the past; see her under the fiery and cruel persecutions of the Roman Emperors; see her standing the brunt of a cruel Nero, of a brutal Domitian, of a blood-thirsty Trajan; see her rent almost to pieces by heresies within and without, the reflex of which is only too discernable in these days. And yet, O Brethren, she is with us still, having ridden out securely and safely the rough buffetings of a thousand storms. And why? why ere this, has she not been wrecked upon the shores of the vast oceans of wickedness that have threatened her on every side? Why? Brethren, because, as Elisha said to his servant—"They that be with us are more than they that be with them." God has been with her; His Angel Host has encamped about her, and we also will rest secure in this hope. We know the powers of hell cannot prevail against her for her overthrow. She is on the side of all that is right and true, and eventually must triumph against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Oh! let us, then, think of the words of the text when our hearts despond, when we think of the little progress there is being made in the world's evangelization. What though the Kingdom of God appears surrounded by the vast army of the Syrian King; though she seem in his very clutch; we know she shall stand as firm and secure as ever. The Lord is on her side, and if God be for her who can be against her? "Fear not: they that be with us are more than they that be with them."

2. And, if comforting and reassuring with reference to the Church as a body, how much more so must the words of the text be with respect to each INDIVIDUAL MEMBER thereof? Yea! how often do we despond? We feel and are conscious how far short we fall of what we should be, and we despair of ever rising to the true greatness and nobility of our baptismal covenant! Our temptations, may be, are very great; we are constantly exposed to them; our circumstances are not the most favourable for growth in grace; those with whom we are thrown in contact do not fear God, they do all they can to draw us astray. And then, perhaps, we have our own very strong inclinations to this or that sin; nay! we, one and all, have some one darling and besetting sin, which constantly comes between us and our God. When we think of these things we feel as if we cannot stand upright, as if it were no use trying to live so as to please God. We feel we must give in; that sooner or later we shall do so whether we will or not. We see only, as did Elisha's servant, the army of the King of Syria. "Alas! my master, how shall we do?" So we cry. Oh! brethren, for Elisha to say to us: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Strong as our temptations may be; powerful and subtle as may be the snares which Satan sets for us; bad as our circumstances may be; still we know that we have One with us Who can enable us to be more than conquerors. We have only to look to Him when waves of temptations beat the heaviest against us—only to take our gaze off the Syrian army and look to the Captain of our salvation, to be more than conquerors in the fight. Let us at such times, and always, realize the unseen presence of the angels of God. Though we cannot see them, yet we know the angels of the Lord tarry round them that fear Him, and deliver them. Why, then, should we despond? My brethren in Christ, if you will you can shake from off you the fetters that are now holding you earthward. You can, if you will, triumph over your untoward circumstances, can stand firm in the midst of ungodly and sinful companions; you can, if you will, overcome your besetting sin, whatever that sin may be. No longer tell me you would be better if things were only more favourable than they are. Nay! I will hear to excuse. You can master that unruly temper; you can keep from deceitful and dishonest practices; you can curb that tongue so prone to idle slander and to gossip; you can keep from living careless, indifferent lives; you can make yourselves fit for Holy Communion. Yes! you can do this, and more than this—you can, if you will, live a godly, useful, true, and heavenly life, notwithstanding all the adversaries of your soul and body. You can do this, I again repeat, because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. God the Holy Spirit has been given you in your Baptism; by His assisting grace you can triumph over all your foes—only be brave and of a good courage. Look not on the Syrian army; look only, by faith, on the angels sent to guard your souls. "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."

2. And one word more before I dismiss you: Would you, whether in respect to the Church or yourselves, as individual members of the Church, ever be able to take to yourselves the comfort contained in the words of the text? you must ever be striving to live to God. Unless you are in earnest about your soul's salvation, you will never be able to realize the truth of Elisha's words. The horses and chariots of fire were round about Elisha long before his servant saw them, but it was not till the prophet prayed and he became spiritually illuminated that he beheld the angelic guard. And so with us. Bodily eyes discover bodily objects; only spiritual can see the things of God. If, then, you have lost the sense of God's abiding presence and help—if you do not find Him a very present help in trouble, you may be quite sure you have wandered from Him. It is only with the eye of faith that the angel of the Lord is discovered. To the natural man, all that I have said is foolishness. I beseech you, then, to live near to your God if you would ever be able to realize His presence with you. Do so and you have naught to fear. "If God be with us, who can be against us?" You, in your struggle for the better land, in your fight against all that is unholy and untrue, you shall be upheld and strengthened by a power, not your own. If you be true and faithful to your God, the horses and chariots of fire shall not only be ever with you while in this earthly Tabernacle; but at last shall carry you, as they did Elisha's master, into the realms of happiness and peace, where we shall rest from our labours and be forever with the Lord!

The Episcopal Register says: "Should not the thoughtful people of the world learn a lesson from the unhappy condition of Ireland. Nearly four centuries ago the Reformation offered religious liberty to all nations. England accepted it, and Ireland rejected it. England is at the head of the world's civilization; Ireland, the victim of demagogues."