

applies equally to all souls for all time; for the great thing that Christ died to procure was forgiveness of sins, and the first words He utters upon His death-cross are a prayer for it. His last declaration is love to His enemies; His last legacy, an earnest request to God for the forgiveness of His persecutors and malefactors. And not only does he wish their pardon—not only does He “*pray the Father for them;*” He even pleads, He turns advocate—“*for they know not what they do.*”

“*Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise*” (S. Luke xxiii. 43.) There is perhaps no passage of Scripture that calls for more earnest attention, more reverent truth-seeking, than this solitarily recorded instance of death-bed forgiveness. Let us consider it, first, as regards our Saviour; secondly, as regards the poor thief; lastly, as regards ourselves.

As regards our Saviour, it is evidently intended as a grand display of His power and grace. Thus He triumphed over Satan, upon the cross; thus He communicated life when He was in the very jaws of death; thus He dispensed pardon; and thus He disposed of a kingdom, as from a glorious throne, when crucified as a malefactor.

As regards the thief, let us see what he did to merit so signal a mercy. One of the fundamental truths of our religion is, that we have power of ourselves to do neither good nor evil; but that we have power to choose whether we will be instruments in the hands of the Holy Spirit, or of the devil—for the temple of one or of the other our bodies must be. Now, Christ's extraordinary meekness and patience under his sufferings, and His prayers for His murderers, were a special revelation of the Holy Spirit; and to this revelation the thief yielded himself up. So yielding, he was led to “*believe in his heart unto righteousness*”—to “*make confession with his mouth unto salvation.*” And this under such disadvantages, such discouragements, as, except the same Jesus were to be again crucified, never can be equalled. He believed Christ to be the Saviour of the world when one of His disciples had betrayed Him, another denied Him, and all of them had forsaken Him; to be the Son of God, the Lord of life, when He was hanging on the cross, suffering the pangs of death, and seemingly deserted by His Father; he proclaims Him the Lord of paradise when all the Jews condemned him, and the Gentiles crucified Him as an imposter and malefactor. He feared God, acknowledged the justice of his punishment, and with patience submitted to it; he condemned himself, and justified the holy Jesus, declaring that He had done nothing amiss. He was solicitous, not for the preservation of his body, but for the salvation of his soul; and not only for his own, but for that of his brother thief, whom he so charitably reprehends, so earnestly requests not to proceed in his blasphemous language, so lovingly invites to the fear of God. The glory, therefore, which this poor thief did to Christ, by his faith and piety, upon the cross, seems such as the whole series of a pious life in other men can hardly parallel.

Lastly, as regards ourselves. Herein is our comfort, that God's mercy is endless, and can never *truly* be sought too late. This pardoned thief is a standing monument of this blessed truth. At the same time, let us remember that the mercies of God are never recorded for man's presumption, nor the failings of man for man's imitation. And further—for fear we should trust to this signal mercy to our soul's death; lest it should be abused, and that God may be “*clear when he is judged*”—it is contrasted with the awful case of the thief who died hardened in unbelief, with a crucified Saviour before his eyes,