

morning, and also the celebration of the Holy Communion the following Sunday. And as for his dress in the pulpit, he explained that, the sermon being a part of the Communion Office, he must remain in the surplice while preaching it, as no other dress was prescribed; and also that he might the more readily return at once to the chancel, to read the Offertory Sentences, and finish the service there.

No one could deny that it was a much more convenient arrangement for both clergy and people, involving no break in the service, no unmeaning absence of the officiating clergyman, and no dressing and undressing almost in the presence of the people. Yet it was so new and unlooked for, and seemed, from certain pamphlets we had been lately reading, to be so clearly the badge of a party, that it evidently alarmed many of the congregation; and I do believe some would have left the church as he went into the pulpit, had they anticipated such a move on the part of the Vicar.

Such a course no one could have justified, so I am very glad they had no time to adopt it. And the sermon was so plain, and tender-hearted, and thoughtful, that I am certain at its close, few cared for the dress of the preacher, all were so solemnized and moved. But I want you to write to me at once about one or two matters:—First, about this frequent communion, and then about the surplice. I confess to being a little afraid of talking to the Vicar. I see clearly I am not going to change him, but I don't want to give in just at once, without a struggle to maintain what I have held so long. So I wish you to prime me—and as I have known you longer and better, and as we are not in the difficulties of daily intercourse, and possibly collision, I can more easily bear to hear home truths from you than from him.

So please write at once. First, about the Holy Communion, what you think on the subject; for he said some awfully solemn things in his sermon, things which made one tremble, and would have kept me back from it last Sunday, only, it being our first communion together, since he had come to be our settled teacher, I could not forego the wish that we should have such a bond of union, and ask at that Holy Ordinance for grace to help each other in our common work. Tell me what you think is the sound Church of England doctrine of the Holy Communion; and also whether you think it useful for the ordinary class of people that it should be celebrated so frequently. I fear it will make it common, and lessen, instead of increasing the number of communicants.

And then tell me your mind about the surplice. That, of course, is of minor importance. Still, as a badge of a party, which many call it, and as that which catches the eye, and in so doing catches the attention often more than the gravest words,—and also as a thing which cannot be of any real significance, and therefore should not be needlessly used, just to frighten folks out of their propriety,—I should like to know whether you think it was wise of your friend to take, the very first Sunday, so decided a step, and perhaps, by so doing, drive away or exasperate those whom he might afterwards win over by gentle persuasion.

I am not quite so cheerful and hopeful about all these matters as I was when I wrote to you first, and saw them only dimly in the distance. I feel now we are in the midst of it all, and that there will be, I fear, some heartburnings before it is set right. My fellow churchwarden has his back sadly up, and looks mischief. And we have lately had an importation into our village, a doctor, who seems as learned in making one kind of wounds, as I hope he may be found skilful in healing others. He is very full of the whole thing, having, in the parish he has just left, got up a public meeting, and made a speech, and moved a resolution, and gone as one member of a deputation to the Bishop with a remonstrance against the rector; and, in fact, done great things in the way of parochial agitation. Already he is looked upon as a high authority, and almost every evening he takes tea with my brother churchwarden and his wife. Hence all the latent danger which is ever looming in his eye.

So really you would pity me, a quiet steady-going, stupid old fellow, who never before bothered himself with parish matters, except to get the church-rate made once a year—and attend the Easter vestry—and sometimes see about a few

parish roads being kept in repair. Now the care of all the Churches, or rather of one, is upon me, and if they all were as heavy on St. Paul as this one is on me, his life must have been a burden. So write at once—for your letters always cheer me—and I shall count the days until I receive your reply.

VI.

REPLY.

That concerning which you wish me to write to you, namely, the Holy Communion, is the gravest and most important subject on which we can muse: and I pray God that we may do so with reverence and godly fear. Indeed, so awful is it, that I deprecate all discussion, and would rather wonder, meditate, and adore, than attempt to explain even my own feelings about the mystery. But you ask me as a sacred teacher to instruct you, and therefore, humbly and teachably, I shall tell you some of the thoughts which, on this great subject, fill my heart.

First, it is a mystery; and being such, I cannot explain it. I can only tell you what I believe. I believe that, in the celebration of that Holy Sacrament, the priest, when he consecrates the elements of bread and wine, fulfils one great part of his office; he presents and pleads before God on behalf of His Church below, the one "perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world," not then offered up, though pleaded as a sacrifice; but having been, once for all, offered up by Christ Himself; and now rising with its incense before the throne on high. And then, having so pleaded with God the great Atonement, as the only plea for man's pardon, he turns round to those kneeling at the altar, and offers to them a portion of that great Sacrifice as their spiritual food,—the Body and Blood of Christ,—to be the life and renewing of their souls.

This mystic food is *there*, at that great feast, but *where* no human eye can see, or thought imagine, or tongue or pen define. It is offered to all, but received only by the faithful—for being not a carnal, but a spiritual food, it can only be received by that power which apprehends and receives spiritual things. Thus the soul which can discern the Lord's Body, so discerns by faith. And they, to whom those awful words,—“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you,”—have a meaning, find what they desire, by faith, in the banquet of that most heavenly food.

To celebrate the Holy Eucharist is the highest act of spiritual worship and adoration which man can render to God. It is not a sacrifice in itself, but it is the pleading of THE SACRIFICE. It is the Church's utterance in act of that which she had said before in word, “I believe in Jesus Christ our Lord.” It is the Church's highest adoration of that Lord, that God-man present in the Sacrament, before whom we bow, as bowed the Jews of old, when the cloud rested on the Ark. He is in a cloud still, we cannot see, or handle, or perceive where. But His Presence is with us in that mystery, and we adore, not the Sacrament, but the Lord of the Sacrament, as, by His own covenant, nearer to us than on any other occasion. *The two or three met together in His Name feel that He is in the midst.*

Such is the Holy Eucharist in its God-ward aspect. In its man-ward blessing it is no less awful and mysterious. It offers food—“the Body and Blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken, and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper.” What the nature of that food is, it is not for us to say. We know no more of it than that it is called in Scripture His flesh and blood—and that it is the means He has ordained by which to impart to us Himself, and daily renew in us the Life Divine.

This only we know, that without it we cannot live:—“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.” It is soul-food, and the only soul-food of which we read in Scripture:—“My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.” And the partaking of it is the mysterious union and communion of us with Christ, and Christ with us:—“He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me and I in him.”

How this is done we know not, no more than

we know how natural food works itself mysteriously into our whole system, and, being different from our bodies before its consumption, becomes a part of our bodies afterwards. If we cannot understand the secrets of natural things which our hands can handle and our eyes see, why wonder if a more intelligible grasp of spiritual things be not given us?

This only we must feel assured of—that its *spirituality* does not lessen its *reality*; that as the soul is as real as the body, so the food of the soul is as real as a real thing requires to sustain it: with this difference, that the body is mortal, and lives by mortal food, and dies;—the soul is immortal, is fed with immortal food, and lives for ever.

In fact, all our life below is but the shadow of the life which is above, and the true realities are in the eternal things themselves, and not in the shadows which they cast.

This thought will remind us that reality does not necessarily imply materiality. That very materiality which we deem so essential to everything, and down to the level of which we would reduce some of heaven's highest mysteries, belongs, as far as we know, only to its present imperfect and limited life. It is the coil which we shall put off when, out of the chrysalis of our mortality, we wing our way into the empyreal air. Our bodies are but shadows of our souls; the bread of which they partake, but a shadow of the Bread Divine; our lips but shadows of the faith which perceives and feeds on heavenly food; and all the outward visible show but a shadow of the processes in our inward spiritual life.

It is all, then, one great act of faith—this feeding upon the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Sacrament; and by faith, remember, I do not mean that cold shadowy thing which some account it; a belief that such and such things will be; as vague and unsatisfying as a dream, and from which oftentimes, as out of a dream, we waken to find that what we grasped at, as a reality, is no reality at all.

But by faith I mean a warm, living, present possession of that which it apprehends. By faith I mean what the Apostle means when he calls it, not a shadow, but a “*substance*” of the things we hope for;—not an imagination, or a guess in the dark, but the “*evidence*” of things not seen. By it we see Him who is invisible. By it we touch Him who is intangible. We eat and drink immortal, and to sense indiscernible food—our material lips pressing the shadow, our immaterial souls feeding on the substance—our mortal eyes seeing only the cloud, our immortal vision discerning the Lord's Body.

Beyond this I cannot, dare not go. Perhaps even thus I have gone too far, prying with too curious eyes into that which is behind the veil. In the cleft of the Rock,—covered with His hand, while He passes by,—let me hide myself; hearing from afar the rush and dash of the rude spirits of controversy, that fret and foam themselves into nothingness at Its base. His voice, clear above the tumult, warning off the intruder—“Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further, and here let thy proud waves be stayed;” but the same Voice, “still and small,” comforting the believer, with all he wants to know,—“I in them, and Thou in me.”

I am hardly in a mood just now to dwell upon a matter so slight as the dress of him whom God so honours, as to make him the appointed means for conveying these blessings to His Church. But as you ask me to give you my views about wearing the surplice in the pulpit, I shall in a few words dismiss the subject. The only recognized dress of the priest is the surplice and stole, with the hood of his degree. The gown is not an ecclesiastical dress; it is as much the dress of every lay as of every clerical graduate; but it is his academic dress only. The clergyman might just as well appear in the pulpit with his ordinary every-day clothes only upon him, as with the black gown, which is a part of his collegiate, not clerical costume. The use, therefore, of a gown at any time during the Church service, is incorrect; but especially during any portion of the Communion Office, of which the sermon is a part. And even the convenience and fitness of always wearing the surplice is evident, where there is but one officiating minister, as is often the case; for, as on all occasions, whether there be Holy Communion or