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"HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS."

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REFLECTIONS ON OUR LORD'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

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How shall mortals speak when God hath spoken! Kings shall shut their mouths in his presence; yet he has said, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. John had been a burning and a shining light, but the Saviour came arrayed with miracles, and adorned with grace. Therefore his fame had attracted multitudes from all the six provinces then occupied by the Jews; and the Lord had compassion on the sheep going astray, without a Shepherd.

Moses, in his Deuteronomy, combined all the great precepts of the law with the mellowing glosses of experience and age. David, in the hundred and nineteenth Psalm, has done the same, and in the beauties of a poetic dress. But our divine Master, from a larger anointing of the Spirit, has combined in this sermon the glory of the law with the superior grace of the gospel; and so connected the two Testaments as to lay a foundation for the economy of the Spirit, which was to follow. Here is an epitome of moral duties and of practical piety; and the disciple who aims at sincere obedience to this code, shall surely sit down with his Master on a happier mount than where it was first delivered.

It may here be remarked, that there is an almost absolute certainty that the Lord delivered this sermon in substance, and recited his parables in different places; and that he would therefore vary his discourses as circumstances would require. This may also account for many inconsiderable variations in the evangelists. The Lord's prayer assuredly was twice delivered. Matt. vi.; Luke xi.

The beatitudes are eight in number: they are designed to comprise the whole of the Christian temper, and they strikingly mark that our Saviour was influenced by the eternal Spirit who inspired the prophets. Instead of addressing himself to the learned and the noble in this sixfold multitude, he fixed his eyes first on the poor in spirit, and on the mourners. So when he commissioned Peter to feed his flock, he mentioned the lambs before the sheep. Thus the high and lofty One promises to dwell with the man who is poor, of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at his word. He looked on the crowd, not for distinction of rank, and splendour of dress, but for all the tender emotions of the heart, and breathings after God. He addressed himself, not to rulers and senators, but to the family of his heavenly Father. He opened his mouth in benedictions, and his words dropped as honey from the rocks. He pronounced the poor blessed, and the mourners happy.

The crowds assembled before him varied very much in age, in rank, and station. Many were teachers, learned in the law; and in the main, the people had come to learn, having hopes that Christ would soon appear. Therefore in a rich and comprehensive discourse, he gave to each a portion of meat in due season.

Having preached good tidings to the meek, he met the prepossessions which the people had received from the scribes, that the new teacher was come to destroy the law, and supersede the prophets of the ancient church. Think not, said he, I am come to destroy, but to fulfil, to magnify the law and make it honourable. He illustrated the law, as a transcript of the moral grandeur of God, shining out in precepts, holy, just and good. He exalted it above all codes, as extending to the thoughts of the heart, and made perfect in the love of God and of our neighbours.

This law, distinguished by prohibitions, is shown to possess a comprehension, and a spirituality, of which the Jewish teachers were not aware. It not only forbids the foul deeds of murder and adultery, but takes cognizance of the thoughts of the heart. It regards anger as the harbinger of murder, and an unhallowed desire as every thing but the accomplishment of crime. Thus our Lord placed the nation speechless at the bar, and prepared the way for true repentance.

This law, so glorious and divine, he purified from all the dark shades thrown upon it, by a commixture with the commandments of men; sordid commandments, bringing lucre to the altar, and shame to the priests. Their corban he covered with reproach, their divorces with infamy; and the love of their neighbour, coupled with the hate of their enemy, he branded as a doctrine of darkness.

From all these sins he urged, not a slow and uncertain reform, but an instantaneous conversion. Cut off thy right hand, pluck out thy right eye; it is profitable to sacrifice thy concupiscence, rather than lose thy body and soul in the pit of Gehenna, where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched. Agree therefore with thine adversary quickly, lest he cast thee into the abyss, whence thou canst not escape.

This Teacher came from God, associated reformation with piety, else reform had been only as the morning cloud. He directed the culprit to bring his gift to the altar, to give alms to the poor, to fast, and weep for sin, and pray to his Father who seeth in secret; then the rewards shall be open in grace here, and glory in the world to come. He clothed and adorned the Church, with a constellation of virtues, which shine with a celestial brilliancy on a benighted world. He allowed no one to revenge an injury, but on the con-