

unto them,' was the blessed echo of his own words, 'Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee;' it was the very word by which he prayed for his murderers on the cross, and taught us in His own prayer to pray for forgiveness. If any would restrain this power to the Apostles only, why not, as said St. Tatian, in the like way restrain baptism also? If the one, then both, were committed to that Church with which our Lord promised to be to the end of time; by baptism to remit all sins, original or actual; by absolution to remit all which by the frailty of our nature any might afterwards contract. What sins, then, might 'be remitted?' All which were not excepted; and these were none. All might be forgiven, for which God put into the heart the desire to be forgiven; the unpardonable sin alone, said St. Augustine, was not forgiven, because the sinner asked not forgiveness. Though his sins weighed down the sinner, defiling his memory, clouding his faith, destroying the power of ordinances, chilling the heart, weakening the will, or even bringing him into relapses, let him with earnest purpose lay down his sins at the Lord's feet, hating them for His love's sake who had so loved him, and He had said, 'Whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them.' Here was no putting off for forgiveness to a future day. The effects of the sin upon the soul might often be to be worked out by sorrow and toil; the forfeited crown and larger favour of Almighty God might be to be gained by subsequent self-denial through His grace, or suffering for Him, but our sins, when we were fit to receive those blessed words, were forgiven at once, 'They are forgiven.' As though He would express the swiftness of the pardon in the same words as in the prophet, 'Thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am; so, as soon as the priest had pronounced his forgiveness on earth, the sins of the true penite it were forgiven in heaven. That word, 'are forgiven,' contained a whole gospel of forgiveness—ful., present, absolute, universal forgiveness. As our revered Hooker said, when a literal interpretation of sacred Scripture would stand, the furthest from the letter was commonly the worst. The psalms, too, which the Church daily put into our mouths, the histories of penitents which she recited to us as ensamples, the writings of the law, the instruction of Proverbs, each supplied some separate note in the divine harmony of that angel chorus, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.' Why, then, did men shrink back from this plain meaning of our Lord's words? Why, but for some imaginations of inherent unfitness, an inability to reconcile to themselves how such 'treasure' should be in 'earthen vessels,' how this power should be entrusted to those who might not use it aright, or might make it but an occasion of sin? But was it not on that very account more according to the analogy of God's dealings since the foundation of the world? Had not He who 'hung the earth upon nothing,' and had made sand to bound the proud waves of the sea, and man alone the lord of this earth, ever shown His almightiness in seeming weakness, that it might be seen that 'the excellency was of Him?' When had he not used means inadequate in order to bring about His end? How was it stranger than that the Lord should 'hearken to the voice of a man,' and the sun stand still at His word, or that through the indwelling of His spirit the voice of the tent-maker in bonds should make Felix tremble, and 'almost persuade' the king in his pomp to belong to the sect everywhere spoken against, and silence the wise of this world, and go through the earth making Jew, and Greek, and barbarian, obedient unto the faith? 'It is not ye that speak, but your Father that speaketh in you.' 'That men upon the earth,' said St. Gregory the Great, 'might have so great power, the Creator of heaven and earth came to earth from heaven; that human weakness might rise beyond itself, the divine might was made weak below itself.' It might be a part of the dignity by the incarnation conferred upon our nature, that God would rather work his miracles of grace through man than immediately by themselves. God, indeed, when he entrusted man with His divine authority, did not part with it so as to confirm that which, through the sin either of him who used it, or him for whom it was used, was done contrary to His will. 'His pardon,' said St. Tatian, 'is in such wise not refused to true repentance, as that no one thereby prejudgeth the future judgment of Christ.' 'We do not,' said St. Cyprian, 'anticipate the judgment of the Lord, who will come to judge; but if he should find the sinner's penitence full and entire, he will then ratify what has been determined by us; but if any have deluded us by a feigned repentance, God, who is not mocked, and who looketh on the heart of man, will judge of those whom we have not seen through, and the Lord will correct the sentence of his servants.' Yet did not God the less, through his servants, what was done aright in his name, because others spoke in that name perversely; he spoke through His true prophets, although others whom he sent not, in his name 'prophecied deceits.' Baptism was not less the laver of regeneration, because it benefitted not those who received it feignedly; nor was the holy Eucharist less the bread of life, because to those who presumed to receive it unworthily it did nothing else than increase their damnation. He did not less speak through those who preached his