

THE SERMON OF THE CROSS;

OR, THOUGHTS FOR LENT AND PASSION-TIDE.

THE season of Lent, has come round again; and again the Church has solemnly and lovingly called upon each one of us to turn unto the Lord our God, not so much with praise and thanksgiving, as more especially with repentance, lowly adoration, abasement alike of soul and body. At such a time, with prayer for and trust in the Spirit's guidance, our eyes turn naturally to Christ crucified; our thoughts to those precious words spoken to us from the cross itself—wrung, as it were, out of our Saviour's dying agony by His undying love.

First of the cross itself.

"*They crucified Him.*" (S. Matt. xxvii. 35; S. Mark xv. 24; S. Luke xxiii. 33; S. John xix. 18.)

In these words there is a notable instance of the simplicity of truth—the simplicity, therefore, of Scripture and Prophecy—which from our practical unfamiliarity with crucifixion, we are perhaps somewhat in danger of overlooking. Christ, when signifying by what death He should die, had said, "*I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*" Now, if we look at the exact mode of crucifixion, we shall see that by no other death could this prophecy—these words, "*lifted up*"—have been literally fulfilled. To crucify, the victim was stripped nearly naked, and then extended on the cross as it lay on the ground. While in this position the nails were driven through the hands and feet (usually by four soldiers, who, in the case of our Saviour, afterwards divided His garments into four parts); and so nailed together, cross and body were "*lifted up from the earth,*" and the bottom of the cross suffered to fall into the hole previously dug for it. Thus, then, was our Saviour lifted up; thus "*they crucified Him;*" thus He took upon Himself not only death, but the lowest, meanest form of death; not only the form of a servant, but of the basest criminal; thus was He not only "*obedient unto death,*" but "*made Himself of no reputation.*"

"*And with Him they crucify two thieves; the one on His right hand, and the other on His left.*" This gives us another view of Christ crucified. Now we may behold the cross as the judgment throne will be: on the one hand the sheep, on the other the goats; on the one hand the penitent saved malefactor, on the other the miserable impenitent railer. And, again, in the two thieves alone, we may see the different effects the preaching of the Gospel would have on the children of men.

Lastly, let us see in Christ's cross a special and strangely beautiful type of that new covenant, that new commandment, that Love, of which He came into the world to be an example and a firstfruit. Let us behold in the cross stretching four ways, the length and breadth, the depth and height, of that Love; and in His arms, extended upon it, the infinite mercy that would embrace all His poor creatures, draw them to His heart, and hold them there.

"*Father forgive them; for they know not what they do*" (S. Luke xxii. 34.) These words seem the very outpouring of the love which we have just been contemplating in Christ crucified. The prayer appears to have been made at the time when the soldiers were employed in driving the nails through his hands and feet; and probably they were primarily intended as the objects of it; since, as Romans, "*they knew not what they did.*" But in its more extended sense it