

thus likewise by the successive things which were in order in the lasts as in their firsts. This now was the cause of the coming of the Lord into the world; thus also He was where there is fulness in His creation; and the Lord works those things which He works, where there is fulness."—*De Athanasii Symbolo (The Athanasian Creed)*, page 27.

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

(EXTRACT FROM A SERMON BY THE REV. E. S. HYATT.)

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Isa. XL. 3.

The word "wilderness" is of very wide signification, "for everything is called a wilderness that is not cultivated or inhabited" (A. C. 3900), and also whatever "is little cultivated and little inhabited" (A. C. 2708). The wilderness altogether uncultivated is man's own will. This is entirely evil and can never be regenerated because it is without any remains of good and truth. These necessary remains are stored up from earliest infancy in the memory connected with the understanding. Hence it is that the understanding is called the wilderness a little cultivated. It is in this latter wilderness that all temptation combats take place, because there, good and evil, truth and falsity, the spiritual and the natural, the Lord and self meet; and there we are continually called upon to choose which shall rule. "I will bring you, saith the Lord, into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face" (Ez. XX. 35). There it is therefore that the Lord effects His Advent to the individual, and it is the aversion which all the natural principles there have to the Lord's pleading which causes temptation combats:—"Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God" (Ez. XX. 36). But, even as it was with the children of Israel, it takes many weary years of pleading before man will permit Him to overcome the power of those natural principles and to introduce spiritual in their place. This is the case not only with the first presentation to the mind of those truths by which the Lord has effected His Second Advent into the world, but with every fresh presentation of them which follows, with every deeper insight into them which may be revealed to us; and the natural mind always rebels and makes way only after defeat in combat. Were it not for the Lord's Infinite Patience, no advance would be possible for us:—"I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead" (Jer. II. 9). Temptation combats therefore indicate the Lord's presence in the wilderness of our minds, combating the evils that reside there. He alone it is that fights for us:—"The Lord shall fight for you and ye shall hold your peace" (Ex. XIV. 14); but for our part we must be intent upon hearkening to "the voice of crying in the wilderness" (Matt. III. 3), which always precedes His Coming; we must prepare the way of the Lord within ourselves. "The voice of crying" is the preliminary announcement that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. III. 2); and the declaration of what it is first necessary for us to do, if we would have that kingdom extended within us.

Now the first recorded word of John the Baptist is "repent" (Matt. III. 2). John the Baptist himself, being "the last of the prophets" (A. C. 3301), represented the Word as to ultimates or externals. "His meat was locusts and wild honey" (Matt. III. 4), that is, the "ultimate or most common truths and their pleasantness" (A. C. 9372).

Thus we gather that "the voice of crying" within us, is derived from the common truths of the external sense of the Word; and what truth is there so commonly, so prominently, put forward in the letter of the Word as the necessity of repentance? Again and again in one form or another does the literal Word repeat—"Except ye repent, ye shall all perish" (Luke xiii. 3); again and again is the command to shun evils as sins against God given in the words "Thou shalt not" (Ex. xx); again and again is it enforced that we must "cease to do evil" before we can "learn to do well" (Isa. I. 16-17). Repentance consists not in a mere general

acknowledgement of our sinfulness, but in acknowledging our specific evils and chunning them as sins against God; thus in an actual turning from them.

Having hearkened to this "voice of crying"; having obeyed the call to repent which the literal sense of the Word repeats so often and so unmistakably; beware of confirming yourselves as mere followers of John the Baptist, depend no further on the mere external senses of the Word; but follow the Lord, who alone is "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John i. 9). The external sense is "not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light" (John i. 8). "For what went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind" (Matt. ii. 7)? Yes, verily, "a reed shaken with the wind" is the Word when it is explained at pleasure (A. C. 9372); and foolish are they who thus render the Word itself a wilderness (A. C. 3900). "If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, He is in the wilderness, go not forth" (Matt. xxiv. 26). Nay, even if they say that there is any real good in even the interior thoughts they derive from the mere letter humanly expounded (A. C. 3900), or in the merely human institutions founded thereon; "if they shall say unto you, Behold He is in the inner chambers, believe it not" (Matt. xxiv. 26). "Believe it not," for though "among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. xi. 2); though among all the truths of the external sense, "there hath not arisen a greater" doctrine than this of the necessity of repentance (A. C. 9372); yet "he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. xi. 2); the very least of the truths in the spiritual sense of the Word is greater than the greatest that has ever been gathered from the external or natural sense which John the Baptist represents.

Let the warning be repeated then, against confirming ourselves as mere followers of John the Baptist rather than of the Lord, which may to some extent be our position if we yield to the temptation to dwell continually in sorrow over some sin of the past in some simple act of repentance, whereby the innumerable other acts of repentance which are necessary for any full extension of the Lord's kingdom within us are hindered. When tempted, therefore, yield not, simply determined in the Lord's name to turn from your sin. It is a dead thing, simply leave it: do not be tempted even to stop and bury it—"Let the dead bury their dead" (Matt. viii. 22). Follow thou the Lord.

But this confirming of ourselves as mere followers of John the Baptist is most effectually done, when we elevate the external sense of the Word which John the Baptist represents, into the supreme place as the object of our reverence and attention, and thus put the mere "witness" of the Light in the place of the Light itself. Neither John the Baptist, nor the external natural sense of the Word which he represents, is of any importance to us except as pointing to the Lord, the Word which dwells within the external sense, and which is revealed to us now clothed in Its spiritual sense, the same sense in which the Word is presented in the Heavens—this alone is the true Light. If we, instead of being led by this pointing of the Natural sense to the Word Itself, of John the Baptist to the Lord, so confirm ourselves in a supreme reverence for the Natural sense that we cannot be led from it to the Spiritual even in the next life, we will thereby shut heaven against ourselves. And even where such confirmation is not carried to that extent, we shall in a degree corresponding thereto shut out from ourselves such realization of heaven here as would be possible if the Lord were revered supremely instead of John the Baptist—the Spiritual sense of the Word instead of the natural.

Let us see to it that John the Baptist occupies only the lowest place in relation to spiritual things, and that the Lord alone be regarded as supreme—the Lord as He now reveals Himself to His New Church in the Doctrines of the New Jerusalem. John the Baptist or the external sense of the Word can do no more than cry to us to prepare the way of the Lord. Let us heed that cry, and then having prepared