

CHRIST THE KING.

A SERMON BY THE REV. W. LANDELS, D.D.

"And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." -Rev. xix. 16.

I UNDERSTAND this text as asserting the kingly authority of Christ in the strongest possible manner, by attributing to Him supremacy over all things. In the context He is represented not only as crowned, but as having on His head many crowns; and in other Scriptures we are told that kings are His servants, and rulers bow to His authority; and that they pay Him homage, who exact and receive homage from others. "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. Yea, all kings fall down before Him; all nations serve Him." He is the Prince of the kings of the earth, King of kings and Lord of lords.

In the first place, the title testifies to His pre-eminent kingly qualities. The true king is not merely the man who reigns, but whose qualities mark him out for dominion. He is, as the title itself indicates, the best regulator, or, as we say in our Saxon speech, the man who *can*, the capable man, the man who can command, not simply because he can wield the brute force, which compels the weak to submit, but the wise and good qualities which make it a privilege to obey Him, and who shows men what is fitting and best for them to do. We are far from saying that such qualities have been always united with the kingly office. Oftentimes, alas! they have been far enough divorced. The world is not always fortunate enough to find its true kings. Either they do not exist, or they have not been discovered, or, for some reason or other, they cannot be had. The title has been oftentimes borne, and the office filled by usurpers, who, by shrewdness and cunning, have forced their way upwards, or by respectable or vicious nonentities, who received it by inheritance, much evil to the community, which they crushed or burdened, but did not govern, being the result of their elevation; but when the world has been happy enough to have the kingly qualities united with the kingly functions, it has shown by its satisfaction with their rule while it lasted, by the manner in which it has preserved their memory after their death, by the epithet which it has coupled with their names—thus it has shown that even in the public estimation the true King is a man, who by His great and good qualities is competent to guide men aright. The qualities which should be associated with the kingly office, judging from the writing of poets and others, are such as these: a courage which fears nothing but wrong; wisdom that can discern and direct; power to protect the interests and win the hearts of others; equity of administration; chivalrous defence of the injured and the weak; large-hearted generosity; a solicitous regard for the welfare of others, and a sacrifice of self in the promotion of that noble end. These, and such as these, are the qualities that befit a King. He who is distinguished by them is royal by nature. Be his rank high or low, he is a virtual king of men. If he fill the throne, these qualities shed lustre on his exalted station, and are fraught with benefits to the community which he governs; if he move in humbler spheres, then, so far as he is known, he wields over others a kingly power, commanding their homage in either case as no one else can. While a stern despot would only excite men's fears, and a weak sentimentalist elicit their contempt, the true King will excite their love and respect. Because of the calumny which sometimes assails a man so distinguished, he may not be at once recognised; but no sooner do men become conscious of his real worth than they instinctively pay him homage. The name of the Second Charles has become a by-word in the nation, which once so foolishly lauded him, while that of Cromwell emerges from clouds of prejudice and slander, and shines like the sun in the cloudless firmament. Such men and the power they wield inspire homage. The First Napoleon was not much of a man morally considered, but he was possessed of some kingly qualities; and there are few more striking scenes recorded in history than his presenting himself to the French army on his return from Elba, when the very soldiers who were ordered to take him bound or dead were struck as statues by his kingly eyes. He spoke; they broke their ranks; they clasped his knees. Such a tendency is common. Let any evidence of the heroic be displayed, and it will not fail to elicit in

some degree the homage and admiration of mankind. And what is this tendency but an indication and a result of man's need of someone to govern and to guide, someone to whose more powerful will they may surrender their own? Their happiness is greatly promoted, when they find one possessed of the requisite qualities; and not a little of their misery is occasioned by their rendering submission to those who are unworthy. What is one and all human governments but a proof of this, and a proof, too, of men's inability to provide for themselves what they so much need.

We dare not think for a moment of comparing our Lord with the men who have been most distinguished by the attributes which I have named. His immeasurable superiority would render such a comparison profane. I have but to remind you of what you have learned before, that whilst the noblest men have possessed these qualities but partially and imperfectly, they exist in Him in a perfected state, in harmonious combination, and in infinite measure. He is the world's ideal King, the object of all its longings, whether they have been related in story or uttered in song. Its fabulous heroes, or the true kings whom it has honoured most, almost deifying some of them, because of the good which they conferred on their people, whether or not they existed as they are seen through the haze with which distance and romance have surrounded them—these men, so far as they were good, are but darkened and shadowy types of the All-perfect One. He combined in Himself all that was kingly in them, while He is exempt from all the imperfections by which their kingly character was marred. Even in the days of His flesh, when His circumstances were so humble, His parents so mean, when He was known as the carpenter's son, the companion of fishermen, publicans, and sinners, a homeless wanderer, these qualities made themselves manifest through all the meanness of His condition. Even men who pretended to despise His teaching felt the majesty of His utterances, and confessed the presence of a kingly nature when they exclaimed, "Never man spake like this man." Even then He exerted a power which took captive men's hearts, and made them who had once felt His influence ready to be bound or to die for His sake, and to rejoice if they were accounted worthy even to suffer shame on His behalf. Since then the mere story of His life and death circulating among the nations, has charmed and won the affections of men, and brought them to bow in humble submission at His feet, until even the foremost nations of the world are more or less subject to His sway; and though He controlled the elements of nature, and asserted His mastery over death and the grave, and by these and other works proved that He was possessed of more than kingly power, yet it was less His miraculous works than His moral qualities—the purity of His doctrine, the beauty of His life, His indescribable moral majesty, the soul-subduing influence which surrounded Him as a halo and went out from Him—that gave Him His mastery over the souls of men. Oh, He is the true King! The heart of humanity, when brought into contact with Him, instinctively recognises its Lord. Though men, through self-will, may refuse allegiance, they cannot but feel how majestic, yea, how god-like was His life; and in proportion as he is revealed to men, in that proportion must they do him homage, voluntarily or by constraint. The noble souls recognising Him first, by reason of their greater sympathy with Him, will prostrate themselves before Him and thus lead the world to pay its homage at His feet, as the magi laid their gold and frankincense there. In point of kingly qualities there are none among the sons of men to be compared with Him. Above all kings He is *the* King, of all lords He is *the* Lord—King of kings and Lord of lords.

Then, again, this passage asserts His control over the mightiest and most exalted of men, for although his dominion is not so extensive as it is destined to become, and the title He bears has not in fact attained to its fullest significance, it is, nevertheless, true that even now He exercises dominion over the kings of the earth. Whether or not they recognise His authority, they are still under His control. Outward wickedness may characterise the steps by which they reached the throne; deeds of treason or of bloodshed may have helped and aided their success; they may never have recognised God as having anything to do with their affairs; yet they are, nevertheless, indebted for their position to Him, and it is by His power and will alone that they hold their crown, for "the powers that be are ordained of God." All the glory of kings withers when He breathes upon it. At His will their strength becomes weakness, the sceptre drops