

theirs : the time was when upon our own mountains the druids of old worshipped the sun and kept alive a sacred fire like that of the Parsees, being like them "strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world ;" and if we are now through the

goodness of God, "made nigh by the blood of Christ," it is that we may show our gratitude by lives worthy of our true and holy faith, so that all may be forced to confess its excellence by the fruits which it produces in the hearts of its followers.

Sabbath Readings.

ANTICIPATIONS.

BY THE REV. H. BONAR, D.D.



HE Church of God on earth is not what she seems ; nay, is what she seems not. She is not a beggar, yet she seems one ; she is a King's bride, yet she seems not. It was so with her Lord while here. He was not what men thought Him ; He was what they thought Him not.

It is in this way that the world is put to shame, its thoughts confounded, its greatness abased before God. And it is in this way that divine wisdom gets large space over which to spread itself, step by step, and to open out its infinite resources slowly and with care (like one exhibiting his treasures), that no part, no turn in all its windings, may be left unobserved. It is not the *result* only that God desires that we should see and wonder at, but the *process* by which it is reached, so unlikely to effect it, yet so steadily moving forward to its end, and so strangely successful in bringing about that end. The planting of the 'trees of God' in Eden, in full strength and fruitfulness at once, was not such an exhibition of wisdom as that which we ourselves see in yearly process before us, when God, out of a small, shapeless seed, brings a stately pine or palm.

In truth, this is the law of our world. It might not be so at first in Eden, when only the *result* was given to view ; but it has been so since, and is so now, for God is showing us most minutely how 'fearfully and wonderfully' all things are made, and we among the rest, in soul and in body, in our first birth and in our second, in our natural and in our spiritual growth.

The tree in winter is not what it appears—dead ; nay, it is what it appears not—alive ; full in every part, root, stem, and branch, of vigorous though hidden vitality,—a vitality which frosts and storms are but maturing, not quenching. All summer life is there ; all autumn fruitfulness is there ; though neither visible. It wraps up within itself the germs of future verdure, and awaits the coming spring. So is it with the Church, in this age of wintry night ; for it is both night and winter with her. Her present condition ill accords with her prospects. No one, in looking at her, could guess what she either is or is to be—could conceive what God has in store for her. For eye has nothing to do with the seeing of it, nor ear with the hearing of it. No one, in

observing her garb or her deportment, or the treatment she meets with at the hands of men, or the sharp, heavy discipline through which she is passing, could take the measure of her hopes. Faith finds difficulty in realizing her prospects, and she can hardly at times credit the greatness of her heritage, when thinking of what she is, and remembering what she has been.

It often seems strange to us, and it must seem much more so to unfallen beings, that saints should be found at all in such a world,—a world without God, a world of atheists, a world that, from the days of Cain, has been the rejecter of His Son, both as the sacrifice for sin, and as the heir of all things. It is not on such a spot that we should naturally expect to find sons of God. Next to hell, it is the unlikeliest place for a soul that loves God to dwell in, even for a day ; and if a stranger, traversing the universe in search of God's little flock, His chosen ones, were to put to us the question, 'Where are they to be found?' certainly he would be astonished when told that they were in that very world where Satan reigned, and from which God had been cast out ! Would he not say, 'Either this is a mistake and a chance, or else it is the very depth of unfathomable wisdom?' For we do not go to the crater's slope for verdure, nor for flowers to the desert ; nor for the plants of heaven to the shores of the lake of fire. Yet it is so with the Church. It is strange, perhaps, to find a Joseph in Egypt, or a Rahab in Jericho, or an Obadiah in the house of Ahab ; but it is more amazing to find saints in the world at all.

Yet they are here. In spite of everything ungenial in soil and air, they are here. They never seem to become acclimatized, yet they do not die out, but are ever renewed. The enemy labours to uproot them, but they are ineradicable. Nay : they thrive and bear fruit. It is a miracle ; but yet so it is. Here the great Husbandman is rearing His plants from generation to generation. Here the great Potter fashions His vessels. Here the great Master-builder hews and polishes the stones for His eternal temple.

Thus, then, one characteristic of the Church is, the unlikeness of her present to her future condition. It is this that marks her out ; that isolates her, as a gem in the heart of a rock, as a vein of gold in a mine. Originally she belonged to the mass ; but she was drawn apart from it, or it fell from off her, and left her alone, like a pillar among ruins. Outwardly she retains much of her former self ; but inwardly she has undergone a change that has assimilated her to 'the world to come.' Thus