

Dominion Churchman.

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THURSDAY, DEC. 14, 1876.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

The triumphant hymns contained in the chapters for this Sunday are very properly referred, by most commentators, to the transactions which shall take place in connection with the future and more glorious appearing of Messiah, when it shall be said: "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us; this is the LORD; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His Salvation." The whole prophecy indeed is wonderfully corroborative of the Divine Nature of Him for whose coming the Church is waiting; and this portion of it especially is referable to the time when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; when the Lord God Almighty which is, and was, and is to come, shall take to Himself His great power, and shall reign; and when the voice as of many waters, and the voice as of mighty thunders shall resound the praises of the Lord God Omnipotent. In the twenty-sixth chapter the attitude of the Church is beautifully represented as one of waiting for the approach of Messiah, and also of waiting for Him in the way of His judgments—availing herself of every dispensation of God's providences to increase her borders, to fructify her virtues, and to advance towards the state and position in which she shall be fit for the reception of her Lord from Heaven.

The COLLECT composed by Bishop Cosin, with a special reference to the Advent Ordination, compares the Ministry of St. John the Baptist, as preparatory to the Incarnation, with the Ministry and stewardship of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, as preparing the way for the Second Advent; so that when the Great Judge Himself shall come, there may be found a people prepared to welcome him coming from the clouds of Heaven. The two objects of the Christian ministry are recognized—its effect on the people, and its securing the honor of Messiah. The Collect is full, and impressive—as worthy of the subjects suggested by the season as the two preceding ones.

The EPISTLE gives the Scriptural authority for the position claimed for the Christian ministry in the Collect.

"Ministers of Christ, and Stewards of the mysteries of God"—subordinate to the Head, and to Him alone, called, appointed, sent by Him, entrusted to do His work, to minister His spiritual bounties." As the word translated *stewards* suggests, they are in His absence, the rulers of His household, the church, the dispensers of the mysteries contained in His word and sacraments. And therefore the responsibility attaching itself to their office, is one which requires the account they have to render to be given only to Him who gave them their commissions. Their judgment, then, is to take place when the Lord shall come, "Who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the heart:" that is the works His ministers have done for Him which may not have come before the world; and the hidden desires, intentions, and motives of the soul—none of which may be cognizable by their censorious earthly judges. And when that time shall come, every man shall have the praise or blame from God that he may deserve; which shall be according to his works, and according to his fidelity in executing the trust committed to him. Christ is here brought before us as the great Heart-Searcher, and therefore as Divine. The grandeur of the position St. Paul assumes for himself, and for the other ministers of Christ is also remarkable. Much as he desired the good opinion of the Corinthians, in order that his labors on their behalf might be successful, yet, after all, the judgment they might pass upon his labors and upon his fidelity was really a very trifling matter compared with the judgment to which all his work had respect—the judgment of the Lord, to whom alone he was responsible. It is also worthy of note that, in the fourth verse, St. Paul uses the term *justification* in a different sense from that elsewhere employed; as it relates, that is, to absolution from final condemnation, and our approbation as righteous at the last day. Our first justification is through the faith of Christ, that is, our full reception of the whole Christian system; our final justification will be according to our works.

The GOSPEL refers to John as sending two of his disciples to enquire of Christ if indeed He was The Coming One—doubtless for their satisfaction, not for his. It contains Christ's testimony to the character of John, and also to his position in reference to the Christian system; as the Gospel for the succeeding Sunday has John's testimony to Messiah. The main subject of this Gospel is the character of Christ's ministry on earth as one of healing, and also as one intended to embrace the whole mass of fallen humanity, without regard to any privileged class as either learned or rich. In the testimony Christ gives to the Baptist, as the Elias which was to come in the character of Messenger of

the Lord of Hosts, it is not necessary to suppose that Christ meant to exclude the idea of the personal appearance of Elijah the prophet, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come. But, as Lord Bacon remarks, many prophecies, perhaps most of them, seem to have "a germinant accomplishment;" and therefore we find them receiving at first a partial fulfilment, and one in a lower degree; afterwards, a fuller, a more literal, and a more glorious one. We find the principle in our Lord's own prophecies relative to His second coming, some of which had a partial fulfilment in the destruction of Jerusalem, while we look for their complete accomplishment when Himself shall come again the second time. And in this way all the early Church understood the prophecy of Malachi relating to the re-appearance of Elijah. Justin Martyr, Theodoret, and others, understand the Lord Himself as intending the same thing, when He said that, "Elias cometh first, and shall restore all things;" nor does there appear to be anything in the New Testament forbidding such an interpretation. The ministry of John the Baptist was indeed a great one, but as the lowest office-bearer in the Christian Church is greater than he was, so his ministry shall be infinitely surpassed in splendor and importance by Elijah the Prophet.

"THE MAN OF SIN."

Of this very extraordinary personage spoken of by St. Paul in the second chapter of his second epistle to the Thessalonians, many and various opinions have been hazarded. The account given by this apostle in his first epistle, of the second coming of Christ, not in lowliness, but in pomp, appears to have confirmed those, to whom he wrote, in the general belief of the speedy approach of the Second Advent. Christ Himself, when on earth, had referred to His coming again as the Great Judge, and had apparently connected that event with the destruction of Jerusalem, which doubtless prefigured it; and the canon of Holy Scripture closes with the startling announcement: "Surely I come quickly." It has, ever since, been made use of as an argument against the inspiration of the early Church, that they were mistaken. Eighteen centuries have passed away, and the signs of the accomplishment of this great hope of the Church are hardly more discernible, than when St. John penned the last sentences of the Apocalypse.

"Age after age has gone,
Sun after sun has set;
And still, in weeds of widowhood,
She weeps a mourner yet."

One of the objects therefore, St. Paul appears to have had in writing this second epistle was to correct the widely spread error on the subject of Christ's speedy appearance in the clouds of heaven; and he shows that he himself was perfectly aware that the day of