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THURSDAY, NOV. 2, 1876.

TWENTY FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The first lessons for this Sunday are three very remarkable chapters in the book of the prophet Daniel—the third, fourth, and fifth. The third chapter gives an account of Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, before which the three Hebrew captives refusing to fall down and worship, were cast into a furnace of fire, from the effects of which they were miraculously delivered. We are not told where Daniel was on this occasion—perhaps in some distant province, on some business of the state. Of one thing we may be certain—he was not among the worshippers of the golden image. The appearance of the fourth figure as one resembling in form and majesty the Son of God, is a remarkable testimony in support of the pre-existence of Christ, and also of the dignity of his Sonship as Divine, and therefore Eternal. Nor is this passage alone in the Old Testament writings. That remarkable passage contained in Proverbs xxx. 4:—"What is His name, and what is His Son's name if thou canst tell?" is equally or even more explicit in support of the same truths.

The fourth chapter gives Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and the first of Daniel's prophecies, which is also the foundation of all the rest. It was in the second year of his reigning alone, or the fourth from the time of his reigning jointly with his father. From the various representations of the four monarchies successively ruling in the world we may infer the successive degeneration in some respects of the governments of the world; but what those respects are may be a question. The first monarchy was the Babylonian or Assyrian which is fitly represented by the head of fine gold on account of its great riches. The breast and arms of silver expressed the Medo-Persian Kingdom; Darius the Satrap being Median, and Cyrus, the real monarch being Persian. Josephus says that the two arms represented the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. The belly and thighs of brass represented the Macedonian empire under Alexander and his successors. The Greeks were famous for their brazen armor, and were therefore called the brazen-coated Achæans. Alexander appeared to bear rule over the world, as Arrian remarks, because ambassadors came from almost all the world, either to profess submission

to his empire or to congratulate him on his triumphs. St. Jerome has a singular remark, to the effect that Alexander's kingdom is rightly named brazen, because of all metals brass is more vocal and tinkles louder, its sound being diffused far and wide, so that it portended not only the fame and power of the kingdom, but also the eloquence of the Greek language. The fourth kingdom was to be strong as iron, and therefore is believed to refer to the Roman power, the two legs perhaps alluding to the two Roman consuls. The iron was mixed with miry clay, as the Romans were defiled by an admixture with barbarous nations; and the ten toes representing the different kingdoms into which the Roman empire was divided, although the enumeration of the ten has sometimes perplexed commentators. Perhaps however we have a certain number given for an uncertain one. The stone cut out of the mountain without hands is unquestionably the kingdom of Messiah, which is divine in its origin, the work not of man but of God, never to be destroyed, but to spread and expand itself until all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. The kingdom of Egypt is not mentioned, as the glory of that was already passing away: Nor is China introduced, as it formed no part of the scene in which the other parts of the civilized world could form a part. It had for centuries upon centuries a world of its own, and though its reign at the time of the Christian era extended as far as the Caspian Sea, yet it exercised no influence upon any part of the world selected as the arena for the development of the kingdom represented by the stone cut out without hands. For the same reason the kingdoms erected by the Tartars, the Saracens, and the Turks, are not referred to in the dream.

In the fifth chapter, the feast of Belshazzar, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, is to be noticed as showing the strange blindness and hardness of heart in the Babylonian Court after the signal instances of the interposition of the God of Israel which had, not many years before, come under their notice. The way in which the prophet reproveth Belshazzar for his heedlessness of the Divine tokens, must have struck as much terror into the king's heart as the mysterious writing on the wall. The nobleness and fearlessness of his language, place the grandeur of his position as the prophet of the God of Heaven in a singularly impressive form. And how affecting is the brief account given by the sacred writer of the termination of that eventful festival:—"In that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, slain!"

THE COLLECT prays for peace; but the EPISTLE warns us that it is a peace which is the result of a warfare which is both offensive and defensive. The con-

nection with the GOSPEL would also be seen by considering the Lord healing the nobleman's son, in its relation to the word "above all taking the shield of faith." The hardened generation of the Jews among whom the Lord came, would not believe in signs and wonders, on any evidence but that of their senses; so that He sometimes could not perform His mighty works among them, because there was no co-operation of faith on their part with the exercise of power on His. The nobleman whose child was healed at a long distance by the will of Christ was a remarkable illustration of a different type of character. In the face of all improbabilities, he believed in Christ. To such a mind as his, indeed, Faith in the Saviour of men is a shield against all the fiery darts of the evil one; for their belief establishes a co-operation between the weak servant and the Almighty Lord. So that faith is not only a defence against the enemy of souls, but it brings down Christ Himself as "a defence and a shield;" so that they can say:—"The Lord is my Saviour, my God, and my might, in whom I will trust, my buckler, the horn also of my salvation, and my refuge."

The several parts of the Christian's armor are very distinctly expressed by the apostle. There is the girdle of truth, which is to give support, firmness, and uprightness. Truth here is sincerity in the consecration of ourselves to Christ,—not doctrinal truth, which is included under the head of the Sword of the Spirit. The breastplate of righteousness includes holiness, both inward and outward. As the breastplate defended the vital parts, so does holiness guard the Christian soldier. The feet "shod with the preparation of the Gospel of heaven," refers to the military greaves, shoes designed to give a firm footing, and to guard against gins and traps. This preparation cannot mean merely a peaceable disposition, nor can it mean a readiness for the march, for the army is not represented as marching, but as engaged in close conflict. It doubtless means reconciliation with God; and it suggests the important consideration that no man is prepared for the Christian conflict but he who is at peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. The shield of faith refers probably in part to the persecutions to which the Christian may be subjected, faith having the power to enable us to quench every fiery dart of persecution, as well as every other fiery dart of trial, affliction, or temptation. Hope is expressed under the figure of a helmet; and thus holiness, faith and hope are all represented as belonging to defensive armour; for without them we are utterly unable to withstand of sin, the world, and Satan. Lastly, St. Paul refers to the Sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, (as the authorised translation has it,) for against this there is no appeal; and if we use it as the Saviour did in His temptation, we shall successfully repel every attack.