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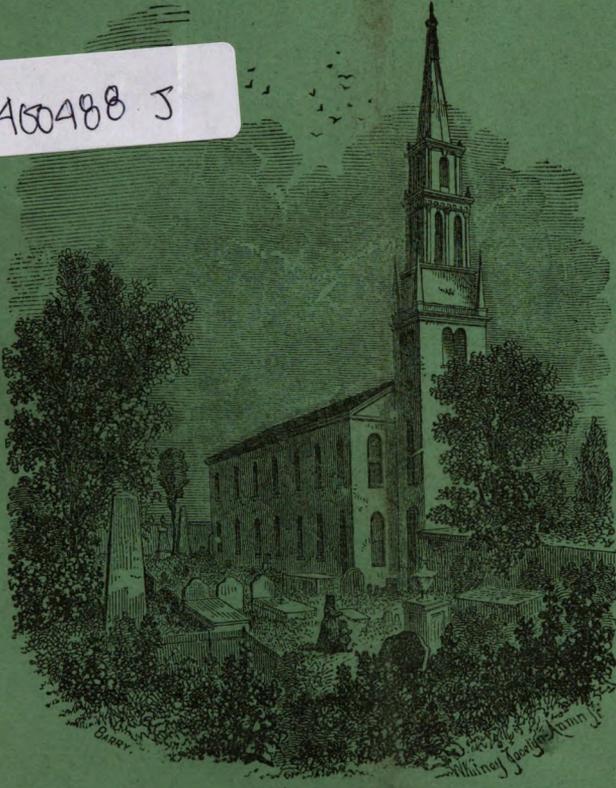
New Series, Vol. IV., No. 3.

Old Series, Vol. XXXV.

Whole No. of Sermons, 835.

THE
NATIONAL PREACHER
AND
VILLAGE PULPIT.

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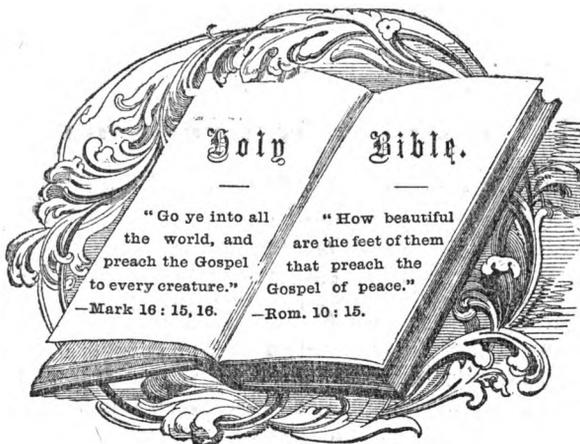


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NEW-YORK:

CONDUCTED AND PUBLISHED BY W. H. BIDWELL, 5 BEERMAN ST.
LONDON: JOHN F. SHAW, GENERAL AGENT, 48 PATERNOSTER ROW. TRUBNER & Co., 60 PATERNOSTER
ROW. LIVERPOOL: E. HOWELL, No. 6 Church Street. EDINBURGH: OGLE & MURRAY, 49 South
Bridge Street; W. OLIPHANT & Co., 7 South Bridge Street; ANDREW ELIOTT & Co., 15 Prince St.
GLASGOW: OGLE & SON, 1 Royal Exchange. MANCHESTER: WILLIAM BREMNER, 11
Market Street. BELFAST: C. AITCHINSON, 9 High Street.



THE NATIONAL PREACHER, And Village Pulpit.

Vol. III.—New Series.]

MARCH, 1861.

[No. 3.—Whole No. 833.]

SERMON VII.

BY REV. CHARLES W. BAIRD,

BROOKLYN, N. Y.

THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY.

“VERILY I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.”—MATTHEW 26: 13.

GREAT love can impose great obligations. It is when justified by a deep and strong affection, that the right of one man to act for others, engaging and covenanting in their behalf—as a king for his subjects, or a patriarch for his descendants—is most freely recognized and scrupulously respected. The unwritten wish, the implied request, will often obtain a fulfillment which no decree of chancery could secure.

Saul, in his cruel zeal for the people of God, had violated the solemn treaty made in the days of Joshua with the inhabitants of

Gibeon. But when David sought to make atonement for the crime, by delivering up seven of Saul's posterity to be slain before the Lord, he remembered the promise he had made to Jonathan, that he would show kindness unto his house forever; and he spared the son of Jonathan, "because of the Lord's oath that was between them." (2 Sam. 21 : 7.)

The Jews had broken every covenant, and made void every vow, when Jeremiah the prophet found one family, the house of Rechab, who had obeyed the voice of Jonadab their father in all that he had charged them, "to drink no wine, nor to build houses, nor to plant vineyards, but to dwell in tents forever." (Jer. 35.)

It is a precious privilege to carry out the intention of a friend. Years after a parent's death, the son discovers in some neglected corner, a manuscript which makes known the unsuspected destination of property left without bequest. It needs no signature or seal to prove the familiar characters. Whatever sacrifice the duty may involve, he cheerfully assumes, rejoicing that somewhat still remains, whereby to honor a memory so dear.

In the Testament or Will of our Lord and Saviour, my brethren, there are some legacies yet unpaid, to be discharged by you and by me. It is true that in a sense he has left us little to accomplish. We are far less executors than inheritors of his grace; a treasure won with his own arm, and distributed with his own hand. But it must gratify us, here and there among these pages, to light upon some clause, some codicil, which it remains for us, in these latter days, and these ends of the earth, to execute; some wise and kindly purpose for us to carry out. Such a privilege is disclosed in the verse of the Gospel which I have read. Let it be our congenial task to fulfill this Scripture on this day. We have here a pledge to redeem, a promise to make good; and that for Jesus' sake. To a poor woman who had done him a valued service, our Friend and Master gave this assurance in our name: "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done, shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." (Mark 14 : 9.)

In order to the more convenient treatment of our subject, we shall discuss it under three heads:

The Deed, its Significance, and its Commemoration.

I. It was at Bethany, six days before the Passover, the last that Jesus ate with his disciples. He had been absent but a little while from the group of faithful friends who so often had entertained him in that village. But this was his first visit among them since that astonishing miracle, the resurrection of Lazarus. If he did not linger then, to rejoice with the sisters over the happy restoration of the brother they had mourned, too well they knew the reason. The good work performed in raising up their dead,

cost him the intensified hatred and persecution of his foes. From that day forth they took counsel together to put him to death. Having for a time concealed himself in a country near to the wilderness, Jesus was now returning to suffer at Jerusalem all things that had been foretold concerning him. Bethany, two miles from that city, was in his way. While there a guest in the house of Simon, a leper whom he probably had cured, perhaps a relative of the family whom he loved, there was prepared for him a supper, at which Martha served; and Lazarus sat with him at the table. And what a scene was that! Christ the first-fruits of the resurrection; and at his side, the earnest of his coming victory, one whom he had raised to show forth in advance his power! Angels were bending over to behold it; and even the obtuse and unbelieving Jews crowded around, "not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead."

Then was this memorable deed performed. "A woman"—say two Evangelists, fearing, it may be, lest by the mention of her name, they should expose her to the malice of the priests, as she was doubtless alive when they wrote—"Mary," says the Evangelist John, who wrote long after, "took an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard, very precious, very costly, and she brake the box, and poured the ointment on his head, as he sat at meat, and anointed his feet, and wiped them with her hair; and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment."

We have no precise knowledge as to the material of which this fragrant balsam consisted. It was prepared in part at least of nard, a medicinal shrub brought from the far East. It appears to have been a liquid of very subtle and pervasive aroma; and in order to the preservation of its delicate perfume, was imported in flasks made of a sort of marble called alabaster. As well from its scarcity as from the distance and the difficulty of transportation, this unguent was most expensive. Judas Iscariot, whose opinion seems to have been shared by his fellow-disciples, at once calculated its worth in money, at three hundred pence, equivalent to the sum of forty-five or fifty dollars. This, unquestionably, in the moderate circumstances of the parties, was a great outlay, and could be justified only by the importance of the occasion, or the dignity of the person in whose honor the deed was performed. It is a trait of human nature, which we see illustrated every week among ourselves, to lavish upon the dead what is withheld or begrudged to the living. Grief loosens the grasp of avarice, and often impels the liberal to a profusion wasteful and ruinous. The Jews did not carry this practice to the extreme witnessed among the Egyptians, whose process of embalmment, lasting from thirty to seventy days, demanded an expenditure ranging from three to five hundred dollars and even upward; but they used spices and other costly compounds, often with great prodigality. Thus it is

recorded of Asa: "They buried him in his own sepulchers, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odors and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecaries' art: and they made a very great burning for him." (2 Chron. 16 : 14.)

And how did Mary happen to be possessed of this costly and precious ointment? It does not appear that she had purchased it recently, or with a view to this application; for our Lord speaks of her as having kept it against the present hour, implying a lapse of time since its procurement; and the disciples who murmured against her, said, It might have been sold for much, as though aware that it had been for some time on hand. Hence the plausible notion, that this may have been the remainder of the ointment which Mary and Martha had purchased for the funeral of Lazarus. That it was used on such occasions, we know. At the moment of our Lord's resurrection, this Mary, with other women, was on her way to his tomb, bearing sweet spices and ointment, bought and prepared, that they might anoint his body after its burial. Perhaps it was a similar design which the coming of Jesus and the raising of their brother to life had interrupted, and rendered unnecessary.

If this be a warrantable conjecture, it leads us to believe that the act, so appropriate, so beautiful, of anointing the body of her Master "aforehand, to the burying," was performed intelligently, by virtue of that prescience which a mighty affection sometimes seems to inspire, if not a distinct fore-knowledge of the event divinely imparted. The friends of Christ, indeed, could not be ignorant of his danger. The chief-priests and the Pharisees had published their intention to destroy him, giving commandment, "that if any man knew where he were, he should show it, that they might take him." Jesus himself had spoken plainly of the fate he was soon to meet; and all things presaged a speedy fulfillment of the prediction. It is not likely that he had concealed from the family at Bethany what he had long since disclosed with such particularity to the twelve: that "the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief-priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day." (Luke 9 : 22.) But the malice of men should not cheat his humble follower of the privilege of preparing that sacred body for the burial. Jesus was now going up to Jerusalem. The threatened vengeance might soon burst upon his head. Severed from those who loved him, it might be that no moistened eye should look on his dying pains, no gentle hand wipe his bleeding brow, no womanly care lay out his inanimate form. Let others provide for his present wants; she thinks of that extreme and bitter hour when all shall have forsaken, and the sufferer be left to cruelty and shame. And bringing forth the costly treasure, kept, it may

be, with some thought of her own decease and burial, she breaks the bottle, and pours out its fragrant contents upon his head, so soon to be crowned with thorns; upon his feet, so soon to be nailed to the tree; and she wipes them with her hair.

II. Observe, secondly, the SIGNIFICANCE of the deed. One only, of those present at this transaction, was competent fully to declare its import. If, as we have supposed, Mary herself, by an instinct of that holy love prompting her to the performance, apprehended somewhat of its meaning, it could have been but a dim and shadowy conception at most. The disciples, from their more elevated stand-point, ought to have been able to form a just as well as generous opinion of this good deed wrought upon their Master; but they were not. Possessed for the time by the bad spirit of parsimony which their apostate companion diffused, their eyes were holden, that they could not see the fitness and the timeliness, the grace and the sweetness and the glory of this loving, adoring prodigality. ONE saw it. But for his divine appreciation, the purest and most beautiful deed that ever woman wrought, had been forgotten out of mind, or had come down to us with the stain of a mean and sordid imputation.

With Christ for witness and interpreter, my brethren, we have little to fear from that most potent of all baneful influences, misconstruction. Ignorant or malignant, the comments of human censors, rectified by one sentence from his holy lips, lose all their noxious power. It can scarcely go harder with us than with her whom the very friends and followers of her Lord condemned with oracular prudence and virtuous indignation. Yet the simple monument of Mary's love, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, rises at his command through the earth-born mists that strive to shut it in. And we may well believe, that one happy result of this lesson, to the disciples of our Lord themselves, was a vivid apprehension of their own privilege of appeal to him as an all-seeing and impartial Arbitrator of motive and action. For the moral grandeur they subsequently attained, as stewards of the mysteries of God, when in the words of one who was added to their company, they could say, "With us it is a very small thing that we should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, we judge not our own selves: but he that judgeth us is the Lord," (1 Cor. 4: 3, 4;) for the dignity of this position, they were perhaps indebted, in no slight degree, to the recollection riveted upon their minds by the saying of Jesus which we have taken for our text; the recollection of that woman, slandered by an apostate, censured by the Jews, rebuked by her kindred, misjudged by themselves; but looking through her streaming tears, confident of a generous appreciation, from

men who troubled, to Jesus who approved her: "Not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts."

Uncharitable judgments, my brethren, are not wholly precluded by our increase of light and liberality; and were it left us to make out the significance of this deed, perhaps we should go as wide of the mark as those who witnessed it first. But the monument bears its own record. Let us approach and read it there, traced by the same hand that raised the memorial, in lines most legible and plain.

(1.) It was a useful work. Such is the first inscription: "Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me." The word thus translated means, primarily—fair, goodly, beautiful, as to external form and appearance. This it was, but the language implies more. "Many good works," said Jesus to the Jews, "have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?" (John 10 : 32.) It was moral excellence that distinguished the miracles and teachings of the Saviour; and the quality pertaining to them he ascribes to this humble performance. More precisely, however, the epithet refers to the effect and influence of the work possessing this quality. This is the ordinary sense of the word, where it is used to characterize the practices of piety among the followers of Christ. "Charge them that be rich," writes the Apostle, "that they be rich in good works;" which he explains by adding: "Ready to distribute, willing to communicate." (1 Tim. 6 : 18.) "They which have believed in Christ," he says again, "must be careful to maintain good works. These things," he continues, "are good and profitable to men." (Titus 3 : 8.) Of the widows for whom provision was made by the churches, he ordains that they must be such as are "well-reported of for good works;" and these he specifies: "If she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work." (1 Tim. 5 : 10.) "Let ours also," he exhorts concerning the members of the apostolic congregations, "learn to maintain good works;" or, as the margin reads, "profess honest trades; that they be not unfruitful." (Titus 3 : 14.) From these illustrations we learn that the transaction before us belongs to the same class of useful and profitable deeds, with alms-giving, hospitality, the training up of orphans, the comforting of the distressed, the diligent pursuit of honorable and remunerative business. A truth in direct contradiction to the selfish utilitarianism of worldly sinners and worldly Christians alike.

(2.) Passing on to another side of this memorial pillar, we read its second inscription. It was a great work. Jesus said: "She hath done what she could." The deed was coëxtensive with her ability; the ability of a rational and immortal creature to honor,

extol, and glorify the Saviour who redeemed her with his most precious blood. To the eye which looked only upon the outward appearance, it seemed an act which nothing but its wasteful extravagance raised above insignificance; to the eye that searcheth hearts, it was grand, august, important. Simon has not done so much in making him a supper; Martha is not doing so much in serving; nor will Peter do more, when fastening his eyes upon the lame man lying at the gate which was called Beautiful, he shall say: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." (Acts 3 : 6.) The value of a deed wrought upon Christ or for the sake of Christ, though relative to us, is absolute to him. If it be our best, though it were another's least, it is great and precious when its perfume ascends to heaven. He asks for our hearts, our whole hearts; and if as the outward sign and seal of that inward consecration, we can give him but two farthings, or a cup of cold water, it is as though we had given him, with that same sanctifying gift, all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory and power.

(3.) There is a third inscription upon the monument. It informs us that this memorable deed was an act of faith in a crucified Saviour. Jesus said: "Let her alone; against the day of my burying hath she kept this." Some would have it, that reference is here made, not to the intention of the woman, but rather to the overruling purpose of Providence: as though the Saviour had said: "She hath done it in effect, though unconsciously, to prepare my body for the tomb." But the extraordinary commendation bestowed upon her in our text, was scarcely such as Christ would pronounce upon a blind instrument for the fulfillment of the Divine will. There were others who unwittingly subserved that will, by procuring the Saviour's death; as Judas, of whom he said: "The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born." (Matt. 26 : 24.) Another such instrument was Caiaphas, who "spake not of himself, but, being high-priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation." (John 11 : 51.) The woman concerned in this transaction, however, was qualified for a far more intelligent part. Who was she? It was that Mary, say some, who washed his feet with her tears, as he sat at meat in a Pharisee's house, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head. (Luke 7.) It was that Mary, as all are agreed, who once sat at Jesus' feet in her own home at Bethany, and heard his word, and chose that good part which was never to be taken from her. (Luke 10.) Of all the followers and friends of Jesus, we read of only one, who pondered and treasured the sayings concerning him with equal intentness; and she was that other Mary, the blessed mother

of our Lord. (Luke 2 : 19, 51.) With no more than the faith of her father Abraham, who longed to see his day, and saw it, and was glad, (John 8 : 56,) she had been competent to this service. But hers was the fuller apprehension reserved for Gospel times; faith nourished not like his by prophecy, nor like ours by history, but by living communication with him who was its author and object. Even the less spiritual Martha had confessed her belief in him as the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. To Mary he was more than Messiah, the Anointed; more than Master, Teacher, Healer; yea, more than the Resurrection and the Life. By the clear illumination of that faith, which is always and in every case the gift of God, enabling us to discover and embrace the Redeemer in all his offices, as Prophet, Priest, and King, she now beheld him also as the suffering Messiah, the atoning Lamb to be slain for the expiation of sins; and she anointed him to the sacrifice of his body upon the cross.

III. Such was the deed, and such, at least in part, its significance. Look now at its **COMMEMORATION**. "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

For the most delicate service that mortal rendered him on earth, our gracious Redeemer provides the most delicate reward. That it was unsought, we know; that it was unforeseen, we may be sure. The promises and blessings pronounced by Jesus were not such as to gratify the ambitious desires of men; though he that refused the petition of the mother of Zebedee's children for worldly preferment, when his disciples asked a recompense for their toils and sacrifices, assured them of an hundred-fold return "now in this time," as well as in the world to come life everlasting. But of all such desires, that for celebrity or fame is perhaps the most refined and the most insidious. We do not learn that our Saviour made to the Twelve any promise of such distinction. It was for two lowly, loving, unambitious women, that this honor was reserved: for the one, that all generations should call her blessed, (Luke 1 : 48;) for the other, that wheresoever the Gospel should be preached in the whole world, approving mention should be made of her good deed.

Upon the immediate disciples of our Lord the accomplishment of this declaration first devolved. Hence Matthew, John, and Peter, (at whose dictation it is supposed that Mark wrote his Gospel,) the three who were present at the scene, all record it; the more fully perhaps, and the more ingenuously, too, because their own uncharitable temper furnished occasion for the reproof it implied. John indeed gives a pleasing instance of his own care to fulfill the command; for happening elsewhere to mention the name of Mary, he adds, with beautiful particularity: "It was that

Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair." (John 11 : 2.) And often, we may suppose, was the touching story of this woman's faith and devotion told by those living witnesses of the event, who preached this gospel to the multitudes of many lands. Once, however, inscribed on this imperishable page, "like words graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever," (Job 19 : 24,) they constitute "a memorial that shall never be forgotten," (Ecclus. 35 : 7.) "None of all the trumpets of fame," one has well said, "sound so loud and so long as the everlasting Gospel." It has been true of the Church of God, as of the dwelling of Simon, that the whole "house has been filled with the odor of that ointment."

And what, my brethren, is the share in this commemoration that falls to us at this late day? What, after so many centuries, shall we do, worthily and honorably, to carry out our Master's purpose here made known? We shall not, like some, exalt the saint to an equality with her Saviour. We shall not build a temple, nor carve an image, nor set apart a day, for idolatrous worship of the creature. That were disparaging to Christ, unprofitable to us, and repugnant to her. Two things are feasible: the one, which we have been endeavoring, by the story of her pious deed read and related from the Gospel page, to keep in fresh remembrance one who was in Christ before us, and who ministered, as it were in our name and behalf, to his comfort. The other, which we shall now attempt, to appropriate this memorial to that one use and service which were all her desire, "the praise of his glory" for whom her deed was wrought.

1. Behold, then, dear friends, how exceedingly precious to Christ is the love of his people! Affection is often squandered on objects most unworthy: the wisest and the best fail sometimes to apprehend the value of sacrifices made for them, and tenderness lavished upon them; but when Jesus becomes the center of our regard, there is no waste of the perfume: there is no depreciation of the gift. Ah! be not afraid then to give him too much! Give him all—the whole heart—keep nothing back. "Jesus is worthy to receive," not thrones and crowns and scepters only, but what he prizes more—incomparably more—the heart, the casket of an offering more sweet to him than aught in the universe beside. Pour out the fullness of your affection upon him who has loved you with an everlasting love, and stooped to the cross that he might win yours. Has he removed some object of your fondness? Have you, like Mary, been called to part for a season with some cherished human friend? Has one or another channel of your affection been cut off? Then let the full tide flow out toward him who was dead, and behold, he liveth for evermore. Give him, your Lord and Master, what you had thought to bury with a

creature: the precious ointment of your kindness and service and zeal!

2. See, too, how precious to Christ is the memory of his people! A signal proof we have in the declaration of our text. For I suppose the design with which it was made to have been rather the illustration of his regard for the memory of all his saints than the elevation of one to a peculiar privilege. To be remembered, my friends; to be honorably remembered; to be lovingly and kindly and gratefully remembered; to be thought of and mentioned, sometimes, often, long after the pulse shall cease to throb, and the brow to ache; to live in the remembrance of the pure and the wise and the just and the holy: ah! what a reward is that! But most of all, to have, in the thoughts of Jesus, a place from which not all the concerns of his eternal kingdom can crowd us; a name "graven on the palms of his hands," (Is. 49: 16;) a name "set as a seal upon his heart!" (Sol. 8: 6.) "This honor have all his saints." (Ps. 149: 9.)

3. Observe, again, how great the jealousy of Christ for the good fame of his people! Lightly, thoughtlessly drops the word of censure, of suspicion, upon the action or the character; sportively are cast the fire-brands, arrows and death of slander; and men hear not the voice that saith: "Let her alone; why trouble ye her?" "He that toucheth these, toucheth the apple of mine eye!" (Zech. 2: 8.) But in that day when he maketh up his jewels, while he vindicates the justice and wisdom of his own law and dealings, surely, the Lord will look upon his people to take away their reproach. "Them that honor me I will honor, saith the Lord; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." (1 Sam. 3: 30.)

4. Mark also how generously Christ estimates the offerings and services of his people! Mary was not so lavish of her ointment, as Jesus of his praise. Not his the moderation that withholdeth more than is meet, in its dread of excess. Plenteous in mercy, full of compassion, is the Master we serve. Good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, is the reward he gives. Be very sure that whatever others may do, he will put the best construction upon a work of faith and love wrought for his sake.

5. Once more, Learn how Christ would have us cherish the memory of his people. Records of good men's lives, are among the means which God hath most emphatically approved and blessed, for the sanctification of believers. Some have chosen or affected to despise these means. It has been said, in the very spirit of that captious criticism which our Lord here condemns, that religious biographies are but a species of romance, as unprofitable and as little to be trusted. The word of God and the experience of Christians alike disprove the unworthy statement. Much of the canon of Scripture is made up of religious biography: and

outside of this canon there is no class of writings that have ministered more effectually to the comfort and growth of disciples in all ages, than this of which we speak. Jesus "will be glorified in his saints, and be admired in all them that believe; because their testimony among us is believed." (2 Thess. 1 : 10.) Would that the example of his faithful servants might be more frequently "spoken of for a memorial," wheresoever the Gospel is preached! Would that the edifying memoirs of so many pious men, and "also of honorable women not a few," with which, thank God! our literature at the present day abounds, might supplant to a great extent the newspaper, the magazine, the novel. Then might we become, more practically and habitually, "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (Heb. 6 : 12.)

And now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us: unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen!

SERMON VIII.

BY REV. SAMUEL T. SPEAR, D.D.,

PASTOR OF THE SOUTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BROOKLYN.

THE DIVINE INCARNATION.

"WHO, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."—PHIL. 2 : 6-8.

THIS passage asserts the doctrine, or rather the fact of the Divine Incarnation in the person and earthly life of the historic Jesus, blending therewith a series of incidents to be found in the Scripture record of that life. The antecedent of the relative pronoun "who," is this very Jesus, in language that admits of no just doubt as to its meaning, affirmed to be divine, and with equal clearness affirmed to be human. These two facts—the divine fact and the human fact—being thus combined in one mysterious person, we designate as a divine incarnation, involving the wonderful