

firm, and safe ground. Before the tribunal of true science the proposition that our Gospels were written by Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and appeared, the first three in the second half of the first century, and the last either at the end of the first or not later than the very first years of the second, would stand firmly for ever. It is of greater importance to note that the first three Gospels, differing somewhat from the fourth, resemble one another in an extraordinary degree, both with regard to the scope, the contents, and the treatment of the narrative. That is why they are not infrequently called in scientific terminology, *synoptical*, and their writers *synoptics*, whose narrations could be disposed in parallel lines. To explain this fact different savants offered (1) the hypothesis of an oral primordial Gospel of a stereotyped form, which with slight modifications was reproduced in our written Gospels; (2) the hy-

pothesis of a written proto-evangelium, which was rewritten by the synoptics; (3) the hypothesis of mutual use by the evangelists of the work of each other, and so forth. No undoubted conclusions can be reached in this direction on account of absence of direct and sure data. It is only certain that at the foundation of our Gospels are laid personal observations and oral communications of eye-witnesses of the life and work of Christ. Naturally, all the information of the kind was sacredly preserved by Christians on—so far as it was possible—strictly inviolate conditions both as regards the form and contents. Nevertheless, literary approximation of the synoptic Gospels permits of the admission that the Synoptics mutually knew the writings of one another, namely, Mark that of Matthew, Luke both that of Matthew and of Mark, as it has already been expressed by blessed Augustine (*De cons. ev. i. 2*).

Happiness at the Table—and After.¹

BY THE REV. A. C. MACKENZIE, M.A., DUNDEE.

WE have had, I believe, a joyous and profitable Communion season, and we are all here, I trust, to give glory to God through Jesus Christ. Whether or not the individual experience has in every case been of this joyous kind, I must for the purposes of my text assume it to have been so. And in any case we can easily imagine it to be so, for we have a common experience of humanity, Christian and unchristian alike, to go upon. We have all at some time or other been present on a festive occasion which we have very much enjoyed. Our pulses beat faster, our spirits rose with the occasion, and our whole being was suffused with an indescribable feeling which we usually express by saying that we greatly enjoyed ourselves.

The day after, when we have brought it all to the clear, cold light of reflection, we sometimes wonder what it was that we did enjoy. The lights, the music, the viands, the decorations, the company, the feast of reason, the flow of soul,—all

¹ Given at a post-Communion service, 28th October 1901.

'For as the sufferings of Christ abound unto us, even so our comfort also aboundeth through Christ.'—2 Cor. i. 5 (R.V.).

these we pass through the mind in turn, but our account of the occasion is unsatisfactory till we combine with these a *something* that we cannot name—the festal spirit of the hour which expressed itself through the whole. It does not diminish our sense of the enjoyment nor make our memory of it pale, that we may not be able satisfactorily to account for it, but if we could lay our finger upon the true cause of it, we could again evoke the same joyous spirit to repeat the experience.

Now in Christian joy the Communion is a thing that a man may feel as he feels the warmth of sunshine without being able to account for it. But Christian joy in any of its phases is not a vague and formless, still less a baseless, thing. It has roots and foundations which can be laid bare. As Christians we are expected to be able to render a reason for the faith that is in us, and as Christian communicants we should be able to say not only that we were happy at the Table, but also why we

were happy there and look forward to being happy again.

In trying to do this—to get at the bases of Christian joy in Communion—we are faced at once with an obstruction. There is a stone at the mouth of the cave which some of us may not be able without assistance to remove. I think St. Paul helps us here and puts a lever into our hand to uplift and remove it. He is speaking in the text of the *abounding* towards us of the sufferings of Christ. The stone in our way is this. The sufferings of Christ we know were the deepest that He could undergo. There was no lower depth that a suffering man could then touch than to be crucified as an evil-doer and in the company of evil-doers. There was no baser form of death then known than crucifixion. We know that to the natural horrors of crucifixion was added unspeakable spiritual distress. One might be crucified in a good conscience, knowing oneself to be innocent, and bear up under it wonderfully, just as martyrs in every cause have borne similar tortures in a frame of moral triumph and even in spiritual ecstasy. But no such experience was Christ's. It was not a martyr's but an evil-doer's death that Christ died. God and man abandoned Him to that, for in some way there was 'laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.' He suffered in a darkness inward and outward. All this is plain enough and simple enough until we place other facts beside it.

Crucifixion, execrable as it was, and slow as the torture it produced was, is not the most horrible torture that the malignant ingenuity of man has devised. There are deaths that are slower and more horrible. There are sufferings that are more prolonged than Christ's. The years of Christ's earthly ministry were few in comparison with the long-drawn-out pains, bodily and spiritual, of many of His own followers even, and of others like the Fakirs of India. Men have died in a prolonged agony of spiritual distress, self-condemnation, inward agonies of the soul, up to the full measure of their powers of endurance. The Cains who have groaned 'my punishment is greater than I can bear' have in all the ages been many. None of them is a saviour of mankind, none of their deaths is commemorated with joy as this death is. We honour the noble army of martyrs, but we are not joyful at remembrance of their sufferings. We turn away from their miserable ends with relief. Why

do we continue and why have millions of men for nearly 2000 years continued to remember *this* one death with joy, and to give praise to God the Father and deep homage and worship to His Son on account of it? What gives weight to this stone of obstruction is this: here were sufferings neither so prolonged nor so awful as we have elsewhere heard of. Why should they be so fruitful that instead of turning away from them we sing Psalms of praise for them and meditate upon them in the night-watches? As Christians we rejoice with trembling. It is a hope with us that we may rejoice with intelligence also and praise God with the understanding.

The angels that have come to our help and have *not* been able to roll away the stone are the theories which have come into the minds of men to explain this suffering and our joyous attitude towards it. One is that although the sufferings were less 'abounding' than those of some others, the Sufferer was of such transcendent dignity that a particle of them might weigh against tons of the sufferings of ordinary human beings. I am afraid that this will not help us much. The lever is too short, the fulcrum too low. In plain English it suggests that a few hours of divine suffering is enough to outweigh the sins of the world in all ages, enough to put away transgressions for ever and ever. Plainly this will not do. Allow for the transcendent dignity and all that can be said or thought about that, and you still leave an outrage upon common sense.

But here comes another angel with a tale more plausible. The Christ is suffering still, sinners prolong and multiply the suffering. In their Communion with Him they reproduce in even more terrible forms the pangs of crucifixion. They literally eat the flesh, they drink the blood of Christ. In other words, we are asked to believe by this expedient of inexorable Roman logic that our Saviour is literally dying daily, hourly, momentarily, and enduring penalties which fiends incarnate might congratulate themselves upon having invented. The Mass puts a bloody lever into our hands, but again it is too short. If it lifts one stone out of our way, it plants a more mighty one right across the path. There are other so-called angels of deliverance, but these are the chief among them.

All the while St. Paul is waiting for us. And his angel is so sweet and calm of countenance, so

obvious too, that we wonder why we had not observed him. Before he speaks of sufferings, St. Paul speaks of comforts (v.⁴), and of what one might call the natural increase of comforts: God comforting us and we in turn comforting others, God's comfort bearing interest and compound interest. This is what he means. And here is an illustration of it. In the ordinary course of duty a trained nurse was sent to attend a rich man in his last illness, which was a peculiarly painful one. Some difficulty was experienced in procuring the nurse. After the rich man's death, his widow was so impressed with the comfort of having a trained nurse in such circumstances, and felt so much for those who might be unable to get one that, in memory of the comfort, she gave a large sum to establish a home for such nurses where people in want of them could be instantly supplied. This was the compound interest of comfort. And if one cared to inquire into the secret history of hundreds of comforting institutions and endowments, one could find similar records. Hospitals, and beds in hospitals and endowments in hospitals (to mention only one channel of comfort), are monuments erected to the comfort experienced by individuals and communities from God Himself. 'The pious founder,' as we used in better days to call him, was one who was himself comforted of God. And so up and down the scale of works of mercy. Now there is an interest and compound interest both in the sufferings and the comforts of Christ. Suffering on behalf of others, and suffering even unto death and unto hard violent, long-drawn-out death for others, has become so common an occurrence that we cease to regard it as a prodigy of Christian valour or virtue. We spend and are spent in the service of our brethren and of the world, and no one thinks of giving us any praise for it. They praise Him who 'left us an ensample that we should walk in his steps.' Whether Christian martyrdom is short, sharp, and violent, or lasts a lifetime, and is like a slow fire, we have ceased to wonder at it, and when we think of it, it is to Him that we put the glory. In this sense there is a fruit of Calvary that is perennial and grows on every soil in which Christianity has been planted. This of itself is a fruit of righteousness entitling Christ to everlasting remembrance and to all the honour that suffering humanity can confer upon Him. It is, if we may so call it, a natural increase, as wonder-begetting

as the million spores that spring from one. But this, though it is more than finite mind can grasp or heart imagine, is not the reason why we worship the Father through Christ, and for what He has done in Christ, and are happy in Communion. Natural increase is wonderful, spiritual increase—'abounding'—is much more. Our Communion is with the Father and the Son through the Spirit, and our adoration of all three Persons is based not on the magnitude of the sufferings, still less on their duration, but on the Divine acceptance of these sufferings, inadequate as they confessedly are, to the putting away of the sin of the whole world in all time.

The Son's sufferings came in the line of the sufferings of the lower creation for the putting away of man's sins. And it was never the *value* of these sacrifices—rather it was the *valuelessness* of them and the gracious acceptance of them by God that awoke in the heart of the true Israelite the praise of His grace and mercy. The gods of the heathen might exact, and did exact, the uttermost farthing. They were hard creditors, inexorable taskmasters, and laid cruel, sometimes far more cruel, retribution on their devotees than the crimes for which atonement was thus made. But *our* God, so an Israelite would say, is a gracious God, who keeps mercy for thousands and passes by the iniquity. The vital spark of the older sacrifice was God's good pleasure, His grace, which accepted so little in lieu of so much and sent His worshipper away, not thinking of his lambs and his bullocks, but sounding the praises of the merciful God on the loud timbrel. God's prophets were not left in ignorance that it was not ten thousand rivers of oil or thousands of rams that were important, but the grace that accepted the cruse of oil and the one lamb. The spiritual increase, the overflow, or, to use the apostle's phrase, the abounding of the sufferings of Christ unto us, has its source not in any magical effect which His transcendent personality gave them, but in the bosom-love and compassion of God, who accepted the sufferings as a ransom for the sin of the world. Thus our Communion reaches up through the channel of the Son's sufferings to the full-welling fountain of the gracious love of the Father who sent Him. And this is why we are glad with a gladness that we can renew and that increases with every renewal of the sacred rite, and with every wind of memory that brings back the fragrance of it. As

it is with the abounding of the sufferings so also is it with the comforts. The life of Christ abounded in consolations. He had no small mercies to be thankful for. They were all great mercies, following Him all the days of His life below. Nathanael's faith, Mary's devotion, voices in the heavens, the perpetual inward voice, the Father's 'well-done,' the assurance of His uninterrupted love,—these strewed the thorny path of suffering with fragrant flowers of consolation. If devils tempted Him, angels came and ministered to Him. And these consolations have had an abounding quality about them, a spiritual increase more wonderful than any natural increase you can think of. The Spirit of Christ dwelling in us has opened our eyes to things that are for us and make our crosses seem as gay garlands displayed on festal days. The Christian who dwells on the sufferings

and magnifies them, and forgets that they were accompanied with consolations, which make us—as they made Him—love the weight we have to bear, is surely yet but an infant crying in the night, who knows not that the Father's soothing voice and helping hand are near.

And the sinner, whose sin is ever before him, and who reflects, as reflect he must, that he is but one of millions of his kind and his sin but one of transgressions that are as the stars for multitude, may well turn away in despair even from Calvary until we show him the abounding quality which God, whose thoughts, blessed be His name, are not as our thoughts nor His ways as ours, imparts to them. Without this the Cross is a rock of offence; with this it is the power of God and the wisdom of God to everyone that believeth.

At the Literary Table.

THE BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

Uniform with the delightful edition recently issued of the 'Horae Subsecivae,' Messrs. A. & C. Black have published a new edition of *Dr. John Brown and his Sisters*, by Miss E. T. M'Laren (2s. net). It is the sixth edition, and it supersedes all others by virtue of an Introductory Note which Professor Crum Brown contributes.

Dr. M'Adam Muir of Glasgow has written an account of the life and works of the chief *Religious Writers of England* enough to make a volume of the 'Guild Library' (A. & C. Black, crown 8vo, pp. 213, 1s. 6d.). No desire for originality, no determination to reverse the popular judgment has led Dr. M'Adam Muir away from his practical purpose of making the lives of these great good men remind the young men of to-day that they too can make their lives sublime.

IMMORTALITY, AND OTHER SERMONS. BY THE REV. A. W. MOMERIE, D.Sc., LL.D. (*Blackwood*. Crown 8vo, pp. 317. 5s.)

Mrs. Momerie has prepared this volume for the press. It contains the chief sermons of the last four years. They mostly treat of the things concerning the End. They treat of these things

unfettered by considerations of system or conformity. Perhaps the deepest interest in the sermons lies in their candid revelation of Dr. Momerie's own hopes and fears as to the things that are behind the veil. For he has as little hesitation in contradicting our cherished notions as in gainsaying the teaching of Scripture and the Church. They read as if they were the sermons of a layman, and in that unwonted aspect they are of much value, the more salutary perhaps the less comforting they are.

THE LIFE AND WORK OF THE REDEEMER. (*Cassell*. Crown 8vo, pp. 384. 6s.)

The editor of the *Quiver* selected twelve men and set them the task of writing the Life of our Lord. Each writer had one period or one set of incidents to write about. The result is both more homogeneous and more edifying than even the editor of the *Quiver* could have expected. For recent study of the origins of Christianity, though it has much disturbed the minds of the unwary, has brought evangelical students of the Life of Christ into closer fellowship, and eliminated much fruitless idiosyncrasy. Each of these studies is