

Sturminster
M

CHRIST'S STAR;

OR,

THE WISE MEN'S OBLATION.

When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him : and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts ; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.—MATT. II. 11.

THE Feast of the Epiphany, or Manifestation of Christ, as it is this day's memory, so I have purposed this day's exercise. As *relatu traditionis instruimur*, there were three principal and notable appearances of Christ on this day. All which *eodem die contigisse feruntur, sed aliis atque aliis annis*,—fell out the same day in divers years, as they write.

So Maximus Episc. : * *Tribus miraculis ornatum diem sanctum servamus, &c.*—We keep this day holy and festival, being honoured with three wonders : this day Christ led the wise men to himself by a star ; this day he turned the waters into wine at the marriage ; this day he was baptized of John in Jordan. According to these three distinct manifestations of himself, they have given this day three several names :—

1. *Epiphania* ; because Christ did appear to certain magi by the direction of a star, and was, by their report, made known to the fox Herod and his cubs, many enemies in Jerusalem. Ver. 3, 'He was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.'

2. *Theophania* ; because there was a declaration of the whole Trinity, Matt. iii. 16 : of God the Father, whose voice was heard from heaven ; of God the Son to be baptized, of whom was the testimony given, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ;' of God the Holy Ghost, who, descending like a dove, lighted on him.

3. *Behphania* ; † because, John ii, he shewed the power of his deity at the wedding, in changing their water into wine. So the text, ver. 11, 'This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory.'

* Hom. I in Epiph. :—'Hodie stella magos duxit ad præsepium. Hodie aquæ vertuntur in vinum. Hodie baptizatus est Christus.'

† From בַּת, *Baros*, a 'bath, or firkin,' Isa. v. 10.—Ed.

4. Some have added a fourth name, from a fourth wonder that they say was wrought on this day: *Phaginphania*; because Christ relieved *famem triduanam*, the three days' hunger of five thousand, with five barley loaves and two little fishes.

I confess, this history hath many observable points in it. It entreats of wise men, of a tyrannical king, of troubled people, and of the King of kings lying in swaddling clothes. To discourse all these *virtutesque, virosque, et tanti incendia belli*, would exceed the limits of one cold hour. I would therefore confine my short speech and your attention to the verse read.

Wherein, methinks, I find a miraculous wonder: that extraordinary *men*, by an extraordinary *star*, should find the King of heaven in so extraordinary a *place*. Wise men seeking a star, shewing a Saviour, lying in a manger. But *cernunt oculis, docentur oraculis*,—the eye of flesh sees somewhat, the eye of faith shall see more.

I may distinguish all into, I. A direction; II. A devotion: the direction of God, the devotion of men. By the direction, they are brought to the Messiah. By their devotion, 'they worship him, and present him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh.'

I. For the direction, we will borrow a little of the premises, and therein consider God's leading—their following.

1. God's leading was by a star. They that delight to cast clouds upon the clear sun have here mooted many questions about this star.

(1.) Whether this star were singular, or a heap of stars. Our Roman adversaries, to bring wilful trouble on themselves and us, have conjured a fiction from one Albumazar, a heathen, that the sign in the zodiac, called the Virgin, is composed of so many stars as may aptly portray *virginem gestantem inter brachia filium*,—a virgin bearing an infant in her arms; and some of them have thought that, this star.

Let Albumazar be the father of this opinion; and for a little better authority, they have mothered it on a prophecy of Tiburtine Sibylla. When Augustus boasted his superhuman majesty, Sibylla shewed him *virginem in cælo infanti-portam*,—a virgin in heaven bearing a young child in her arms; with these words, *Hic puer major te est, ipsum adora*,—Yonder infant is greater than thou art, O Cæsar; worship him.

But because the father of this conceit was an ethnic, and the mother thought a sorceress, they have, as some think, spite of his teeth, brought in Chrysostom for a godfather to it; or to another opinion, if differing from it, yet also exceeding the truth of this history. Whether of himself, or on their teaching, he says thus:—'This star appeared to them descending upon that victorial mountain, having in it the form of a little child, and about him the similitude of a cross.' But I confess (and lo the great vaunts of their unity!) that many of them are of another mind.

Howsoever, the text is plain against it: ver. 2,^r *ἴδομεν αἶτροῦ τὸν ἀστέρα*,—*vidimus stellam ejus*. Aster and astrum differ, as *stella* and *sidus*. Aster and *stella* signify one star; *astrum* and *sidus* a knot of stars; as any sign in the heaven, coacted and compounded of many stars. The evangelist here useth the singular word, 'We have seen his star,' not stars.

(2.) They question whether this was a new star created for the purpose, or one of those coeval to the world. Chrysostom, Damascene, Fulgentius, with most others, are persuaded it was a new star. Houdemius, an Englishman, so sung of it—

'Nova cœlum stella depingitur,
Dum sol novus in terris oritur;'

'Twas fit a new star should adorn the skies,
When a new Sun doth on the earth arise.'

It is called by Augustine,* *magnifica lingua cœli*,—the glorious tongue of heaven. It appears this was no ordinary star, *ex situ, motu, tempore lucendi*.

[1.] By the site. The place of it must be *in aere terræ vicino*,†—in that part or region of the air that was next to the earth; otherwise it could not so punctually have directed these wise men that travelled by it.

[2.] By the motion. The course of other stars is circular: this star went straight forward, as a guide of the way, in the same manner that the 'pillar of fire,' Exod. xxxi. 21, went before Israel when they passed out of Egypt.

[3.] By the time of shining. Other stars shine in the night only: this star gave light in the broad day, as if it were a star appointed to wait on the sun.

'Stella luce vincens Luciferum,
Magos ducit ad regem siderum.'

Of this star did that conjurer prophesy, Num. xxiv. 17, 'There shall come a star out of Jacob,' &c. It was a true star, it was a new star, created by God in heaven for this purpose. Not that the birth of Christ depended on this star, but this star on his birth. Therefore it is called Christ's star: ver. 2, 'his star.'

This star served to them *ad ducendum*, to us *ad docendum*.

It led them really, let it also lead us figuratively, to Christ; them *per visum*, us *per fidem*.

By the consent of divines this star did prefigure the gospel; and in deed, for what other light directs us to Christ?

Not the star of nature. Did not every step it taught us to tread bring us further off? If it heard of him, it sought him—as Laban sought his idols in the tents, or as Saul sought his asses in the mountains, or as Joseph and Mary sought him among their kinsfolk—either in the tents of soft ease and security, or in the mountains of worldly dignity, or among the kindred of the flesh, friends and company.

Not the star of the law. For this told us of a perfect obedience, and of condemnation for disobedience; of God's anger, our danger; of sin and death. This star would have lighted us to heaven, if we had no clouds of iniquity to darken it to ourselves. And that which St Paul speaks, Gal. iii. 24, 'The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ,' is to be understood of the legal types and sacrifices; where, by an oblation of the blood of beasts, was prefigured the blood of that Lamb which should expiate all our sins.

The gospel is this star; and blessed are they that follow it. It shall bring them to the babe Jesus. God hath fixed this star in our orb; but how few are so wise as these wise men to follow it! That star was sometimes hidden: this shines perpetually. It is horror and shame to speak it, we no more esteem it than if we were weary of the sun for continual shining.

2. I am loath to part with this star; but other observations call me from it. You hear God's leading; mark their following. This is described—(1.) *Ex adventu*, by their access; (2.) *Ex eventu*, by their success. *Veniunt, inveniunt*,—They come, they find.

* Serm. 3 in loc.

† Thom., part. iii., quæst. 35, art. 7.

(1.) Their *access*. Some have thought that these magi, having so profound skill in astrology, might by calculation of times, composition of stars, and stellations of the heavens, foreknow the birth of the Messiah. But this opinion is utterly condemned by Augustine* and all good men; and it shall only help us with this observation:—

God purposed so plentiful a salvation by Christ, that he calls to him at the first those who were far off. Far off indeed; not only in a local, but ceremonial distance. For place: they were so far as Persia from Judea; from thence most writers affirm their coming. For the other respect: he calls those to Christ who had run furthest from Christ, and given themselves most over to the devil—magicians, sorcerers, conjurers, confederates with Satan in the most detestable art of witchcraft. These that had set their faces against heaven, and blasphemed out a renunciation of God and all goodness, even at those doors doth God's Spirit knock, and sends them by a star to a Saviour.

Be our sins never so many for number, never so heinous for nature, never so full for measure; yet the mercy of God may give us a star, that shall bring us, not to the babe Jesus in a manger, but to Christ a king in his throne. Let no penitent soul despair of mercy.

Christ manifested himself to two sorts of people in his swathing-clouts—to these magicians, and to shepherds; the latter simple and ignorant, the other learned and wicked. So Augustine,† *In rusticitate pastorum imperitia praevallet, in sacrilegijs magorum impietas*. Yet to both these, one in the day of his nativity, the other in this epiphany, did that Saviour, with whom is no respect of persons, manifest his saving mercy. Whether thou be poor for goods of the world, or poorer for the riches of grace, be comforted; thou mayest one day see the salvation of God.

Observe their obedience: they come instantly on God's call. They have seen his star, and they must go to him. They regard not that Herod was an enemy to the king of Persia, their master; they come to his court to inquire for Christ. When they are there, let Herod be never so troubled about the name of the true and new-born King of the Jews, they have the inward direction, the record of an ancient prophecy added by the priests: ver. 6, from Micah v. 2, 'Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.' Hereupon they go.

Obedience, when it hath the warrant, goes upon sound and quick feet. *Nec falsa fingit, nec vera metuit impedimenta*.—No obstacles can stay it, no errors stray it, nor terrors fray it; it is not deluded with toys, nor deferred with joys; it carries not with the young man in the gospel, to kiss his friends, nor with the old man, to fill his barns: but *currit per saxa, per ignes*, through all dangers and difficulties, with a faithful eye bent upon the caller's promises. And this is that other virtue remarkable in these wise men.

Observe their faith: they come to the priests made acquainted with the oracles of God, to inquire of this King. The priests resolve the place of his birth from the prophet; but though told of his star, they will not stir a foot towards him. Perhaps it might cost them their honours or lives by the king's displeasure; therefore they will point others, but disappoint their own souls.

Here is a strange inversion; *Veritas illuminat magos, infidelitas obcecet magistros*.—Truth guides the magicians, unbelief blinds the priests. They that were used to necromantic spells and charms begin to understand the

* De Civit. Dei, lib. v.

† Sermon 2 de Epiph.

truth of a Saviour; whiles they that had him in their books lost him in their hearts. *Utuntur paginis, quarum non credunt eloquiis*,—They turn over the leaves, and believe not their contents. To what end were all their quotidian sacrifices? If they were not types and figures of a Messiah, what other thing made they their temple but a butcher's shambles?

Now the mercy and grace of our Lord Jesus keep us from this apostate wickedness! Let truth never speak it of us, that we have the book of the Lord in our hands, not the doctrine in our consciences; that we have God's seals, yet unmarked souls; that *de virtutibus vacui loquimur*,—we speak of the graces we have not.

It was once spoken of Greece, in regard of the ruins, (yea, of the utter extinction, for *etiam periere ruinæ*.) *Græciam in Græcia quærimus, non invenimus*,—We seek for Greece in Greece, and cannot find it. Let it never be said of us in respect of our recidival disobedience, *Angliam in Anglia quærimus, et non inventa est*,—We seek that famous church of England in England, and find it not. Many love to live within the circumference and reach of the gospel, because it hath brought peace, and that peace wealth, and that wealth promotion. But if this health of quiet might be upheld or augmented by that Roman harlot, they would be ready to cry, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!' and Christ might lodge long enough at Bethlehem, ere they would go to visit him. Our lives too prodigiously begin to portend this. But,

'O faxit Deus, ut nullum sit in omine pondus.'

And for ourselves, beloved, let us not, like the priests, direct others to a Saviour, and stay at home ourselves; nor like the trumpeter, that encourageth others to the battle against the enemy of God and our salvation, *nihil ipse nec ausus, nec potuit*,—ourselves being cowards, and giving never a stroke. It is not enough to tell the people of a Saviour in Bethlehem; *opus est etiam præitione, aut saltem coitione, et pari congressu*,—we must go before them, or at least go with them.

For this cause I commend the faith of these magi. Seeing the priests' doctrine concurs with the star's dumb direction, though Herod will not leave his court, nor the scribes their ease, nor the people their trades; yet these men will go alone to Christ. When thou art to embrace religion, it is good going in company, if thou canst get them,—for the greater blessing fall, upon a multitude,—but resolve to go, though alone; for thou shalt never see the Lord Jesus, if thou tarry till all Jerusalem go with thee to Bethlehem.

(2.) We have heard their advent, or access; listen to the event, or *success*: 'They saw the young child with Mary his mother.'

God hath answered the desire of their hearts; they had undertook a long journey, made a diligent inquiry; no doubt their souls longed, with Simeon, to see their Saviour. Lo! he that never frustrates the faithful affection, gives abundant satisfaction to their hopes: 'They saw the young child with Mary his mother.'

Observe, [1.] Whom; [2.] With whom; [3.] Where they saw him.

[1.] *Whom?* 'The young child.' Meditate and wonder. The 'Ancient of days' is become a young child. The infinitely great is made little. The sustainer of all things, sucks. *Factor terræ, factus in terra, Creator cœli, creatus sub cœlo*.*—He that made heaven and earth, is made under heaven upon earth. The Creator of the world is created in the world, created little in the world: 'They saw the young child.'

* Aug. Serm. 27 de Temp.

[2.] *With whom?* 'With Mary his mother.' Mary was his daughter; is she now become his mother? Yes; he is made the child of Mary who is the father of Mary. *Sine quo Pater nunquam fuit, sine quo mater nunquam fuisset,**—Without whom his Father in heaven never was; without whom his mother on earth had never been.

[3.] *Where?* It is evident in St Luke's Gospel, they found him lying in a cratch. He who sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high was lodged in a stable. He that 'measures the waters in his fist, and the heaven with a span,' Isa. xl. 12, was now crowded in a manger, and swaddled with a few rags. Here they find neither guard to defend him, nor tumults of people thronging to see him; neither crown on his head, nor sceptre in his hand; but a young child in a cratch: having so little external glory, that they might have saved their pains, and seen many in their own country far beyond him. Our instruction hence is, that—

God doth often strangely and strongly exercise the faith of his; that their persuasion may not be guided *oculis*, but *oraculis*,—by their sight, but his word. The eye of true faith is so quick-sighted, that it can see through all the mists and fogs of difficulties. Hereon these magi do confidently believe that this poor child, lying in so base a manner, is the great King of heaven and earth. The faith of man, that is grounded on the promises of God, must believe that in prison there is liberty, in trouble peace, in affliction comfort, in death life, in the cross a crown, and in a manger the Lord Jesus.

The use of this teacheth us not to be offended at the baseness of the gospel, lest we never come to the honour to see Jesus. It was an argument of the devil's broaching, 'Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on him?' John vii. 48. The great, the learned, the wise gave him no credence. But 'this people, that knoweth not the law, is cursed.' None but a few of the rascal company follow him. But hereof Simeon resolved his mother Mary: 'This child is set for the fall, as well as the rising again, of many in Israel; for a sign which shall be spoken against,' Luke ii. 34. He should be thus; but woe unto them that so esteemed him! It is God's custom to work his will by contraries. If a physician should apply a medicine contrary to the nature and complexion of the patient, he would have little hope to cure the disease. But such is God's miraculous working, that he subdues crowns to a cross, overcomes pride by poverty, overthrows the wisdom of the flesh by the foolishness of the Spirit, and sets knees a-bowing to a babe in a manger.

II. You see their access, and the event, or success; which points determine their direction. Let us come to their devotion. Herein we shall find a triplicity; to follow the method of Augustine's gloss, *Adorant corporibus, venerantur officiis, honorant muneribus*,—Christ hath bestowed on these magi three sorts of gifts—goods corporal, spiritual, temporal; and all these in a devout thankfulness they return to Christ.

1. In *falling down*, they did honour him with the goods of the body.
2. In *worshipping him*, with the gifts of the mind.
3. In *presenting to him gifts*,—gold, frankincense, and myrrh,—with the goods of the world.

1. and 2. The body and mind I will knit together, 'They fall down and worship him.' It is fit they should be partners in repentance that have been confederates in sin. It is questioned, whether in transgressing, the body or the soul be most culpable? I am sure either is guilty. It is all one: a man that wants eyes carries a man that wants feet; the lame that

* Aug. Serm. 27 de Temp.

cannot go spies a booty, and tells his blind porter of it, that cannot see. He that hath eyes directs the way : he that hath feet travels to it ; but they both consent to steal it. The body without the soul wants eyes : the soul without the body wants feet ; but either supplies the other to purloin God's glory. Discuss whether more, that list ; I am certain both the blind and the lame are guilty. Both have offended, both must in a repentant oblation be offered to God. Therefore saith Paul, Rom. xii. 1, 2, not only ' Present your bodies a living sacrifice,' but also, ' Be transformed by the renewing of your minds.' Bodily labour profits little without the soul ; and it is a proud soul that hath stiff knees. These magi therefore give both : *proidentes adoraverunt eum*.

Here is one thing sticks horribly in the Papists' stomachs ; and like a bone in the throat, will neither up nor down with them. ' They fell down, and worshipped *him* ;' not *her*. This same leaving out of her hath much vexed them. How much would they have given the Evangelist to put in *illam* ! They saw him with his mother ; yet they worshipped him, not his mother.

They have troubled us and themselves with many arguments, that though this was concealed it was not omitted. And they are resolved to believe it, though they cannot prove it ; and that, though it be not so good, shall be as ready. Howsoever they will confute the magi in their practice ; for they still will *adorare eam*, when perhaps they forget *eum*, and give the mother more honour than her Maker. It was but mannerly in Bellarmine to postscribe two of his tomes with *Laus Deo, virginique matri Mariæ*,—' Praise to the Lord, and his mother the Virgin Mary.' Some, setting the cart before the horse, have written, *Laus beatæ virginis, et Jesu Christo*,—' Praise to the Virgin Mary, and Jesus Christ.' And they have enjoined ten *Ave Marias* for one *Pater noster*. It is to be feared at last they will adore her for their Saviour, as they do for their mediator, and shut Christ quite out of doors.

But let me come out of Babel into God's city. ' They fell down, and worshipped him.' Let our instruction hence be this :—

God did ever so strangely qualify the baseness of Christ, that though he seemed in men's eyes a contemptible object, and abject, Isa. liii. 3, yet he was so beautified with some certain mark of his divinity, that he might be discerned to be more than man. Here, when he had an ox-stall for his cloth of estate, he had a star from heaven to shine forth his glory. Now, when generally in the world there was as much thought of the man in the moon as of Christ, the Sun of righteousness, behold magicians come from the east, and prostrate themselves before him.

The eye of their flesh saw his rags of poverty ; the eye of their faith saw his robes of glory. Instead of the cold stones and pavement, they saw his sapphires, jaspers, chrysolites. Instead of his manger, they saw his throne. For the beasts about him, they saw armies of angels attending him. For his base stable, they saw *palatium centum sublime columnis*,—a palace of many turrets. They beheld *magnum in parvo latere* ; that this little child was a great King, yea, a great God, yea, a great King above all gods. Thus, as Thomas in one of his hymns—

' Quod non capis, quod non vides,
Animosa firmat fides,
Præter rerum ordinem.'

' What we neither feel nor see,
Powerful faith believes to be.'

When Christ was first revealed to poor shepherds, he was not without a

choir of angels singing his glory, Luke ii. Let him be in the wilderness amongst wild beasts, even those glorious spirits are his pensioners, and minister to his wants, Matt. iv. He comes hungry to a fig-tree, to demonstrate his natural infirmity; but finding no fruit on it, he curseth the fig-tree,—‘Never fruit grow on thee hereafter,’ Matt. xi.,—to declare his power. Must he pay tribute? Yet the King’s son should pay none: but he is content to be a subject, he will pay it; but he bids Peter go to the sea and take it out of a fish’s mouth, Matt. xvii. To shew his humility, he will pay it; but to shew his divinity, he bids the sea pay it for him. He that undertook the misery to be whipped, Matt. xxvi., did also, to prove his majesty, whip the buyers and sellers out of the temple, Matt. xi., which was no less than a miraculous wonder, that a private man should do it without resistance. Yea, when he was dying between two thieves, he so qualifies the baseness of the cross that he works in the heart of one to call him Saviour, and to desire remembrance in his kingdom, Matt. xxvii. When his soul was leaving his body, as a man, even then he ‘rent the veil of the temple, shook the earth, tore the rocks, opened the graves,’ to prove that he was God.

Thus, in his greatest humiliation, God never left him without some testimony of his divine power; that as beholding him hungry, thirsty, weary, weeping, bleeding, dying, we say, *O homo certe*,—Sure he was a man: so, commanding him to calm the seas, command the winds, heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out devils, we may say, *O Deus certe*,—Sure he was God. Thus these converted magicians beheld him *hominem verum*, though not *hominem merum*,—a little child, a great God. To borrow a distich of a divine poet—

‘O strangest eyes, that saw him by this star,
Who, when bystanders saw not, saw so far!’

3. Men are especially taken with three things—submission, honour, gifts. These wise men therefore having fallen down and worshipped him, do now ‘open their treasures, and present him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh.’

Divers of the fathers have diversely glossed these wise men’s gifts:—

Bern.: They did offer gold, to relieve Mary’s necessities; frankincense, to sweeten the stable; myrrh, to comfort the swaddled babe. Others thus—

They did offer gold to Christ, as being a king; frankincense, as being God; myrrh, as being man, to die for the redemption of the world.

Ambros.: *Aurum regi, thus Deo, myrrham defuncto, or morituro*,—Gold for a king, incense for God, myrrh for a man that must die, a special unguent to reserve the body from corruption.

So Basil: *Ut regi aurum, ut morituro myrrham, ut Deo thus obtulerunt.*

The same Hilary: *In auro regen, in thure Deum, in myrrha hominem contentur.*

All the fathers and other writers harp on this string, and sing the same note,—Nazianzen, Cyprian, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory, Fulgentius,—that in gold, they acknowledged him a king; by incense, God; by myrrh, a passible and mortal man. So the Christian poets have sung—

‘Aurea nascenti fuderunt munera regi:
Thura dedere Deo: myrrham tribuere sepulchro.’

So another—

‘Aurum, thus, myrrham, regique, Deoque,
Hominique, dona ferunt.’*

* These lines are misquoted from Juvencus; they ought to stand thus:—

‘Thus, aurum, myrrham, regique, hominique, Deoque,
Dona ferunt.’—Ed.

In general, learn two profitable instructions:—

(1.) They come not to Christ empty-handed. It was God's charge to Israel, Deut. xvi. 16,—but we think now we are delivered from that law,—*Non apparebis in conspectu meo vacuus*, 'Thou shalt not appear before me empty.' You plead, God cares not for our sheep and oxen, or the fat of our rams; for all the world is his. He requires it not for himself, though due to himself. Give it then to his poor ministers, to his poor members here.

I know not how happily I am fallen into that I would never be out of—charity. Most men now-a-days, as it is in the proverb, are better at the rake than at the pitchfork, readier to pull in than give out. But if the Lord hath sown plentiful seed, he expects plentiful fruits; an answerable measure, heaped and shaken and thrust together, and running over. If God hath made the bushel great, make not you the peck small. Turn not the bounty of heaven to the scarcity of earth. We love the retentive faculty well; but our expulsive is grown weak. But as God hath made you *divites in arca*, so beseech him to make you *divites in conscientia*. Accept not only the distributive virtue from heaven, but affect the communicative virtue on earth.

As in a state politic, the liege ambassadors that are sent abroad to lie in foreign kingdoms secureth our peaceable state at home, so that we disperse abroad makes safe the rest at home. The prayers of the poor, by us relieved, shall prevail with God for mercy upon us. The happy solace of a well-pleased conscience shall rejoice us, and the never-failing promises of God shall satisfy us. We hear many rich men complain of losses by sea, by debtors, by unjust servants: we never heard any one complain of want that came by charity. No man is the poorer for that he gives to the poor; let him sum up his books, and he shall find himself the richer. As God therefore hath laid up for you *in terra morientium*, in this world; so lay you up for yourselves *in terra viventium*, in the world to come. As you are rich in the king's books, be rich in God's book. If it were possible all the world should miscarry, your treasure in heaven is in a sure coffer; no thief, rust, moth, fire, shall consume that. You shall find God the best creditor; he will pay great usury, not ten in a hundred, but a hundred, a thousand for ten.

(2.) Their gifts were not slight and trivial, lean, meagre starvelings; but *optima, optima*,—every one the best in their kinds. Gold is the best of metals, frankincense of aromatical odours, myrrh of medicinal unguents.

Match these wise men, O ye miserable times of ours. *Raro reddentem, rarissime optima reddentem profertis*. You seldom bring forth a man that will give, but almost never one that will offer the best gifts. Our lame son must be God's clerk, our starved lamb, our poorest fleece, our thinnest sheaf must fall for God's tenth. If we give him the shells, the husks, the shreds, the shreds of our wealth, we judge him beholden to us.

God hears the heavens, and the heavens hear the earth, and the earth hears the corn, wine, oil, and they hear us, Hos. ii. Our valleys stand thick with corn, our trees groan with the burden of fruits, our pastures abound with cattle, and we return God either nothing, or the worst we can pick out. Take heed, lest God 'curse our blessings,' Mal. ii. 2; and whiles our barns and garners be fat, he withal 'send leanness into our souls.'

Never think, ye miserable worldlings, without opening your treasures and presenting the Lord with liberal gifts, ever, with these magi, to see the face of the Lord Jesus. Go home now, and make thyself merry with thy wealth, whiles Christ stands mourning in the streets; applaud thy wardrobe, whiles he goes naked; saturate thyself with thy fat morsels, whiles he begs, unrelieved, for the crumbs; beek thy pampered limbs at the fire, whiles he shakes

through cold : thy misery is to come, thou shalt not behold thy Saviour in glory.

Generally their example hath taught us somewhat ; to be charitable, to be rich in charity, 1 Tim. vi. 18. More specially they shall instruct us to particular gifts.

Some have alluded these three, gold, myrrh, and frankincense, to the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity.

‘Auro virtus perhibetur amantis :
In myrrha bona spes ; thure beata fides.’

By incense they understand faith ; because as that is to be offered, so this is to be reposed in God alone.

By myrrh, hope ; that though death lay the body in the cold earth, and send it to putrefaction, yet hope shall, as it were, embalm it with myrrh, and give it expectance of a better resurrection.

By gold, love and charity ; the use of it being such as it can procure them to whom we give it necessary things to the sustentation of their lives. *Et quid non venditur auro ?*

Others have resolved it thus :—

‘Pro myrrha lachrymas ; auro cor porrige purum.
Pro thure, ex humili pectore funde preces ;’—

‘Pure heart, thy gold, thy myrrh be penitence ;
And devout prayer be thy frankincense.’

In a word—

First, Offer up to God thy frankincense, supplication and thanksgiving. Ps. cxli. 2, ‘Let thy prayer be set forth before him as incense, and the lifting up of thy hands as an evening sacrifice.’ Put this into Christ’s censer, and it will make a sweet smoke in God’s nostrils. ‘Whoso offereth me praise glorifieth me,’ Ps. l. 23. It shall perfume thy soul, qualify the stench of thy iniquities, and vindicate thy heart from the suffocating plague of sin. Say then, Ps. liv., ‘I will freely sacrifice unto thee : I will praise thy name, O Lord, for it is good.’ Freely, for this must be *frankincense*.

Next, Present to him thy myrrh, a chaste and mortified life. Let thine eyes, like the hands of the church, Cant. v. 5, ‘drop down sweet-smelling myrrh.’ Let them gush forth with penitent tears, and thy soul pour out floods of sorrow for thy offences. ‘We have sinned, we have sinned : oh, let the Lord behold our oblation of myrrh, accept our repentance !’

Lastly, Thou must give thy gold also : a pure heart, tried in the furnace of affliction, and sublimed from all corruption. And because God only knows the heart, and the world must judge by thy fruits ; give thy spiritual gold to Christ, and thy temporal gold to his poor members. Here take with thee three cautions :—

Caution 1.—That all these gifts be derived from an honest heart. It is said of these magi, ‘They opened their treasures, and presented unto him gifts.’ Man’s heart is his treasury ; thou must open that when thou presentest any gift to the Lord. He that comes with an open hand and a shut heart, shall be answered of God, as Belshazzar was of Daniel, ‘Keep thy rewards to thyself, and give thy gifts to another.’

Caution 2.—That thy gifts observe the true latitude of devotion, which endeavours to extend itself to the glory of God, the good of thy brother, and the salvation of thy own soul. And to all these three may these three gifts of the wise men be referred. The incense of prayer respects God, the gold

of charity respects our neighbour, and the myrrh of mortification respects ourselves.

Caution 3.—That you offer not only one, but all these. It hath been questioned whether these magi did offer *singuli singula* or *singuli tria*. But the consent of divines is, that they gave every one all, *semel et simul*. Thy oblation will not be welcome, if any of the three be missing; give then all.

Some will give myrrh, but not frankincense; some will give frankincense, but not myrrh; and some will give myrrh and frankincense, but not gold.

First, Some will give myrrh,—a strict moral life, not culpable of any gross eruption or scandalous impiety; but not frankincense. Their prayers are thin sown, therefore their graces cannot come up thick. Perhaps they feel no want; and then, you know, *raræ fumant felicitibus aræ*. In their thought they do not stand in any great need of God; when they do, they will offer him some incense. These live a morally honest life, but are scant of religious prayers; and so may be said to offer myrrh without frankincense.

Secondly, Some will give frankincense,—pray frequently, perhaps tediously; but they will give no myrrh,—not mortify or restrain their concupiscence. The Pharisees had many prayers, but never the fewer sins. These mock God, that they so often beg of him that his will may be done, when they never subdue their affections to it. There are too many such among us, that will often join with the church in common devotions, who yet join with the world in common vices. These make great smokes of frankincense, but let not fall one drop of myrrh.

Thirdly, Some will give both myrrh and frankincense, but by no means their gold. I will give, saith the worldling, a sober life,—there is my myrrh; I will say my prayers,—there is my frankincense; but do you think I will part with my gold? This same gold lies closer in men's hearts than it doth in their purses. You may as well wring Hercules's club out of his fist, as a penny from their heaps to charitable uses.

You have read, 2 Sam. xxiv. 24, how Araunah, like a king, gave to the king oxen for sacrifice, and the instruments for fuel. But David answered, 'Shall I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing?' These men will give God oblations, and enough, provided they cost them nothing. The usurer must save his gold for his idolatrous eye, the drunkard for his host, the lustful for his whore, the proud for his back, the epicure for his belly. Can you hope they will part from their gold?

'Aurum omnes, pulsa jam pietate. colunt.'

Oh, this damned sin of covetousness, how many it keeps from the grace of God and the gates of heaven! Men think they can never have gold enough. They write of the toad, that she eats of nothing but the earth, and thereof no more than she can hold in her foot at once; and the reason they give is, that she fears the earth would be wasted, and none left. A fit emblem of the covetous, who fear to take their portion of the things God hath given them under the sun, lest they should want; when the bottom of their patrimony, moderately unravelled, would last to ten frugal generations.

How this sickness grovels! How it stoops him into earth, into hell! This disease lies in men's bones. I have read of a beggar that passed by a company of rich men, and earnestly besought their alms, complaining that he had a secret disease lying in his bones, that he could not earn his living. They in charity gave him somewhat, and let him go. One amongst the rest following him, would needs know of him what that secret disease should be,

seeing that outwardly he seemed to ail nothing. Quoth the beggar, You cannot see it, for it lies in my bones ; and some call it idleness. You see many a rich man, whose cup of wealth runs over ; you wonder to see him so miserable, both to himself and others. Why, there is a disease that lies in his bones, that keeps him from working the works of charity, from relieving his distressed brethren ; you may call it covetousness. They will part with anything, so they may keep their gold. But we must give our gold too with the rest. If we offer not all, Christ will accept none.

I will end with a consolation ; for who can shut up this story with a terror ? The Lord will so graciously provide for his, that in their greatest extremity they shall not be destitute of comfort. Though Mary travail in her travel,—for she was delivered in Bethlehem, whither she came to be taxed, Luke ii, and likely wanted necessary provision for her infant and herself,—behold, God will relieve their poverty, and send them gold from the east : as he once in a dearth provided for Jacob's family in Canaan, by a store of bread in Egypt. Comfort shall come when and whence we least expect it. Rocks shall yield water, ravens shall bring meat, rather than we shall perish ; even our enemies shall sustain us. 'I have been young, and now am old ; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread,' Ps. xxxvii. 25.

'By whom all things were made, and since have stood :
By him they all shall work unto our good :'

To whom be praise for ever! Amen.