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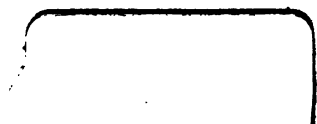
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A PLAIN DISCOURSE
UPON THE
HOLY COMMUNION.

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A PLAIN DISCOURSE

UPON THE

HOLY COMMUNION:

WRITTEN WITH A VIEW OF PROMOTING,
AMONG ALL RANKS,
THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUE NATURE OF THE SACRAMENT
OF THE LORD'S SUPPER;
WITH WHAT IS REQUIRED TO BE A WORTHY
COMMUNICANT.

BY JOHN CLARK, M.A.

*Vicar of Duxford St. John, in the County of Cambridge;
formerly Fellow of Clare Hall.*

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TO THE READER.

THIS little Discourse was written for the benefit of my own Congregation. It was necessary that it should be plain, and simple as possible; or it would have been above the comprehension of many.

If it should be at all serviceable, in promoting piety to God, faith in the Redeemer, and goodwill, peace, and love, among those who read it; thus rendering them disposed, and qualified to receive the Holy Communion; the utmost wish of my heart will be gratified, while I shall ever be thankful to Him, who is "Lord of all," and "in whom we live, and move, and have our being."

DUXFORD, April 28, 1827.

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A PLAIN
DISCOURSE, &c.

1 COR. XI. 28.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

THIS passage, which of itself seems simple, and easy of comprehension, stands between two others, which have given much trouble to many well-disposed, but not well-informed Christians. While some, perhaps, come to the Lord's Table, without serious consideration of what is required of them; others, in all probability, stay away, because they do not understand the true nature of the Sacrament, or, because they mistake the meaning of some portions of Holy Scripture, connected with the subject, which appear to them of a mysterious, or alarming description. And, surely, it must be confessed, that the two verses, on either side of the text, come upon the weak, or misguided mind, with a powerful effect—"Wherefore," says the Apostle in the verse, which precedes the text, "whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup

unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." And in the verse which follows the text, the Apostle thus expresses himself—"For he that eateth and drinketh *unworthily*, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

First. Let us endeavour to explain, satisfactorily, the difficulties of these verses.

Secondly. Let us next shew the nature of the examination, which is demanded of us in the text.

Thirdly. We will conclude with a few observations, to encourage persons to partake of this Holy Communion.

And here, in the first place, I would ask, of whom is the Apostle speaking, that are "*guilty of the body and blood of Christ.*"

St. Paul, in this Epistle, is addressing himself to the Corinthians, a thoughtless, dissipated, and licentious people: who had lately been converted from the idolatry of heathenism, to the Christian faith. Now, in their administration of the Sacrament, the people of Corinth manifestly committed two great and flagrant offences:—for, they excluded their poorer brethren from the Lord's Table, and thus did not discern, did not consider, that as the body and blood of Christ were freely and graciously offered once *for all*,—so all, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, are freely also

invited, and most affectionately called upon, to partake of the benefits and the blessings of this great Christian Sacrifice: by excluding the poor from *his* Table, "who is no respecter of persons," the Corinthians clearly mistook the nature of the Lord's Sacrifice, and the plain meaning also of the institution of the Lord's Supper, as we find it recorded in the Gospel; — "And as they were eating (the Passover) Jesus took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Matt. xxvi, 26, 27, 28.

Again, secondly, the Corinthians were guilty of another great offence; for they ate and drank at the Lord's Table to excess. "Therefore, says the Apostle, some were hungry, and some were drunken."

The poor, who were hungry, not only in a temporal sense, but many of them, perhaps, in a Spiritual sense also,—these poor were excluded, shut out, from the Lord's Table.

The rich, moreover, who did attend, profaned the service of the temple, and abused the blessings of the Lord's Supper. For the blessings conveyed to us in this Sacrament, are, undoubtedly, of a spiritual nature: and so our holy Church teaches,

in answer to this question, what are the benefits and blessings, which we receive thereby? "The strengthening and refreshing of our souls, by the body and blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the bread and wine."

For this abuse, therefore, this profanation of the Holy Sacrament, of which the Corinthians were guilty,—“for this cause,” says the Apostle, “many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep:” that is, were punished with death.

Thus, we see, that the punishments, which were inflicted upon the Corinthian people, were evidently of a temporal description; such as weakness, sickness and death.

And what ought we, in common charity, to suppose? but that these persons, of whom the Apostle is here speaking, were thus punished in this life, and thereby spared the future visitation of God's wrath in another world.

This, then, is the “*damnation*,” or rather the *judgment*, or *condemnation* which is here mentioned by St. Paul; “Whoso eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.” And ought this to excite the surprise or wonder, much less the offence, of any considerate person? namely, that the Corinthians should be thus visited, thus judged, thus punished, thus brought by their own folly under condemnation? and here it may be fairly demanded, what was the

conduct of St. Paul under these peculiar circumstances? Does he tell the people of Corinth to stay away from the Lord's Table, lest they should fall under condemnation? Does he tell them, that by staying away, they would escape this judgment? No—by no means; on the contrary, St. Paul gives them, and at the same time gives to every one of us, the very best advice, the very best counsel, which could possibly be offered: "Let a man examine himself," (says the Apostle,) "and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

Now, it is plain from this statement, that Christians of the Established Church cannot be guilty of these abuses, of these excesses, here mentioned by the Apostle, and laid to the charge of the Corinthians, and to their charge only, so far as those offences extend. At the same time, far be it from me to assert, that we cannot be guilty of *other offences*, relative to the Lord's Supper, and which may justly alarm every considerate mind.

If, for instance, we approach the Lord's Table without repentance, without a due and lowly sense of our manifold offences and infirmities, if we do not come with a lively faith in God's mercy, as displayed in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, if we are destitute of the heavenly influence of Christian charity, on our

hearts: in all these cases, we are manifestly *unworthy* not only to approach the Lord's Table, but to offer unto God, at any other time, the sacrifice of prayer and praise—for without faith, repentance, and charity, it is impossible to please God.—God is in heaven, and we on earth; God is enthroned in infinite holiness, and in unsullied glory, and we are vile, and miserable sinners.

How then can we presume to approach the Lord our God, unless by faith and repentance, by a lowly, contrite heart, by an humble, yet thankful spirit, and by being in love and charity with one another? These are the great essentials of worship at all times, and in all seasons of our lives. Therefore, these same good and blessed qualities are here required of every communicant, in the celebration of the Sacrament.

If, again, we approach the Lord's Table with feelings of pride, either worldly or spiritual pride; if we despise our poorer brethren, for whom, and for whose salvation, the blood of Christ was freely offered, as well as for our salvation; by such manifestly misplaced pride, by such spiritual contempt of other people, we clearly break that royal law of charity, which enjoins us to "love our neighbour as ourselves." If, again, we come to the Lord's Table, from any worldly, or selfish, or pecuniary motive, we offend against that love of the Redeemer, which we are exhorted to feel at

all times, and more especially at this Feast of love, this great commemoration of the compassion and loving-kindness of the Saviour. It is the heart, and the dispositions of the heart, which the Lord our God regards. For he that made the heart, knows every thought, and every imagination of the same. And, therefore, the Lord God addresses himself to every one of us, saying, "Give me thine heart, my son" (Proverbs xxiii. 26.). If our hearts be not in the service of God, neither we ourselves, nor any thing we do, will be accepted or regarded by him. If our hearts be far from God, then all our offerings and oblations will be no better received than those of Cain. And let us remember what is written in the word of God, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember, that thy brother hath ought against thee: leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Matthew v. 23, 24. God who made us, and who rendered us, by his Spirit dwelling in us, accountable creatures, this same Lord God will judge us by his Son Jesus Christ, and by the word of the everlasting gospel.

And since the Lord our God is holy, and commands us, saying, "Be ye holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus xix. 2.); and since we fall short of this holiness of character, since "in many things we offend all," and all have gone astray, like wander-

ing sheep, it is plainly necessary, therefore, that we come to the Lord's Table, with great lowliness and contrition of heart, with unfeigned sorrow, that we have offended so holy, and so gracious a God.

Therefore, the first duty required of us, is such a repentance, as may be *answerable* to the exhortation in the text, and at the same time *suitable* to the multitude, and magnitude of our offences. "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

The best explanation of these words of the text, may be gathered from the answer given in our excellent Church Catechism, to the question, "What is required of them who come to the Lord's Supper?" The answer is this: "To examine themselves whether they repent them truly of their former sins, stedfastly purposing to lead a new life, to have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of his death, and to be in charity with all men."

We learn from many passages of holy Scripture, that God heareth not, neither will he regard the wilful sinner. What then? If the sinner would be heard, he must undoubtedly repent. He must return to that blessed God, whom he has offended: every sinner, who wishes to be heard, who hopes to be saved, must forsake every evil way, every sinful habit, every uncharitable thought;

according to the words, and to the tenor of that holy Scripture, which says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord his God." Isai. lv. 7. The sinner must resolve upon a life of better obedience; and he must pray for God's grace, to enable him to keep his resolutions: "He must cease to do evil, and learn to do good." He must approach the throne of grace with "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ:" Acts xx. 21. Let a man examine himself then, in some such manner as this: Have I really repented of my past sins, and if I think that I have, what fruits am I prepared to shew? Do I firmly believe in God's holy Word, in God's mercy, his covenanted mercy, his great and endless compassion, assured to every penitent sinner, in the Gospel of his beloved Son? What fruits do I shew of this belief? Do I humbly hope and trust in God, that he will forgive me for Christ's sake; that he will mercifully forgive what I have done amiss, the many omissions of duty, and the many transgressions of his righteous law, of which I have many times been guilty? Do I hope that I shall be pardoned for the sake of that atonement for sin, which the Redeemer made upon the cross? And, if I entertain this sweet hope, and trust in God's mercy, for the sake of what my Saviour has suffered for me, let me ask my soul

these simple and plain questions:—Do I love God, who has been so gracious to me, who has so loved me, as to give his beloved Son, a ransom for my soul? And do I love the Lord Jesus Christ, who for me and for my salvation suffered death upon the cross, thereby to make the atonement, and to be the propitiation for sin? Do I delight in the service of so merciful a God, and so gracious a Saviour? Do I keep holy the Sabbath day? Do I call it, and regard it as an honourable day, as a truly delightful day, as the happiest day of the seven; as the blessed day of the Lord God, who made me, and who redeemed me, and who has commanded me, and all people, to “keep holy the Sabbath day.” If we can answer satisfactorily to these several questions of self-examination, happy are we! We have then put on some parts of the wedding garment, with which every good Christian must be clothed, and adorned; for I have already brought forward, “Repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, with a thankful remembrance of his death.” But there is still one part of the wedding garment, or rather one jewel belonging to it, which requires next to be considered; namely, “Love and charity toward all men.”

And is it not, I pray, greatly to be regretted, that Christians can want any exhortations to a duty, so solemnly required of us; and upon the

due performance of which duty our eternal interests are suspended? who can read and reflect upon the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, and not see and feel the necessity, the absolute necessity of Christian love, and Christian charity? what is the representation there given to us? Is it not, that every Christian grace adorns that breast, in which the love of God abounds, and in which also the love of man, for the Lord's sake, prevails: while, every degrading quality, every vicious, and defiling propensity is supposed to dwell in that bosom, in which hatred and malice, and bitter resentment unhappily predominate.

Of the good, and also of the disobedient, we find it thus expressed: "inasmuch as ye have done it," this service of love, "to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Of the other party, the disobedient, the Judge will say, "inasmuch as ye have not done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have not done it unto me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous to life eternal."

The good, that is, the comparatively good, for strictly speaking, "there is no one good but God," the good, who have let the light of their religion, and of their religious duty, their faith, and their good works, their labour of love, and acts of charity; all they, who have thus caused their light to shine before men, to the glory of God, these

are represented by the Saviour, as being set, on the awful day of judgment, on the right hand of the Judge, and as being received as the blessed children of God. But what is said of the other party, who have not let the light of Christ's Gospel shine in their faith and works; but, on the contrary, who have made shipwreck of their faith, who have disobeyed the commands of God, and have cast the blessings of the Gospel covenant behind them? What shall be said to them, and to all such, by the Judge? "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Are not these words calculated, and intended to speak to the hearts, and to the consciences of us all? to shew us, in the strongest point of view in which the subject could possibly be placed, and to impress upon our minds, the infinite importance, and the absolute necessity of Christian love.

May this sweet spirit of love (the love of God and the love of man) be shed abroad in our hearts, and be testified, in the benevolence, in the true Christian charity of our lives!—that *charity*, which is represented, as greater than even *faith*, and *hope*; which shall survive, in immortal beauty, when faith in the Son of God shall be lost in his blissful presence, and when hope shall be swallowed up in enjoyment. *That charity*, which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all

things, endureth all things : which “ is not puffed up” with self-importance, but is meek and lowly, as was Christ : that *heavenly charity*, which bears and lightens the burden of others, which forbears and forgives ; and, after all, is kind.” (See 1 Cor. xiii.)

Thus adorned with these Christian graces, a lively faith, a sincere repentance, and a fervent charity, we shall appear before God, our reconciled Father, in the true “ wedding garment.” Thus shall we worthily partake of this Feast of Love, at the Table of our Lord ; and thus shall we hereafter be admitted to the thrice-happy enjoyment of the “ Marriage Supper of the Lamb,” in the kingdom of God. Let us cherish this love, this faith, this repentance, this heavenly charity in our hearts. So shall we assuredly pass through the changes and chances of this mortal life with peace, comfort, and spiritual joy : and so, by the great mercy of our God, and, through the infinite merits of redeeming love, we shall hear these transporting words, “ Come ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you ; enter ye into the joy of your Lord.” And what are the high privileges, and the spiritual joys of the good Christian, even in this present life ? “ I will love him, says Christ, and my Father will love him, and we will come and make our abode with him ; we will come and sup with him.” (John xiv. 21, 23.)

Are not these sweet encouragements, heavenly promises, sufficient to warm every heart, and to excite every Christian, to be present at the commemoration of the Sacrifice of the Lamb, the true Paschal Lamb of God, slain for the redemption of mankind? And what are the words of our holy Church? "The benefit is great, if, with a true penitent heart and lively faith we receive this holy Sacrament; for, then, we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink His blood; then we dwell in Christ, and Christ with us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us." But, as the benefit is great to every worthy partaker, to every penitent believer in the gospel of Christ Jesus; so also is the danger great, if we receive the same *unworthily*.

But, if we be unworthy, whose fault is that? Most assuredly our own fault. If any person be conscious of sin, either public or private sin, why does he not repent and amend? Consciousness of faults should produce, in every generous mind, a sincere and ready repentance. And, I would ask, is not our danger great, if we do not receive the Sacrament? Is not the danger great to every one, who turns his back upon the invitation, and who thus neglects and disobeys the last command, the last request of the Saviour? Christ says to all His followers, "Do this in remembrance of Me." And, again, he says, "Except ye eat the flesh of

the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Except ye spiritually partake of the body and blood of Christ, commemorated in this Holy Sacrament, ye have no spiritual life in you. And, if so, how, I pray, can any person neglect this service, and be *blameless*? When the spiritual benefits of Christ's sacrifice are thus graciously offered in the holy Sacrament: how is it that any man has the heart to refuse?—how can we have the spirit of Christ, if we wilfully disobey the words of Christ? “If ye have not the spirit of Christ, says the Apostle, ye are none of His.” (Rom. viii. 7.) And if so, whose are we? “His servants ye are, to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness.” (Rom. vi. 16.) If we abide not with Christ, after this life, where shall we abide? “Where shall the ungodly, and the sinner appear?” If we would obtain an entrance into heaven, how is it to be obtained? How, indeed, but by the merits, mediation, and atonement of Christ Jesus?” “There is salvation in no other.” “There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts iv. 12.) And, how, I humbly ask, can we expect a favourable reception, from the Lord Jesus Christ, if we neglect this ordinance of His own appointment? It must, surely, be true, as the ever to be respected Bishop Wilson observes, that “it is at

the peril of any man's salvation, if he refuse to partake of this Holy Communion."

The blessed God can surely cause his benefits to flow, in whatever channel, in whatever way he pleases to ordain. Thus, the common waters of Jordan, by the Lord's good pleasure, healed Naaman the Syrian. Thus, the water in baptism, by the appointment and grace of Christ, cleanses every soul from the ill effects of the curse, originally pronounced against man, and brings him into the covenant of the Gospel, renewing the heart, and regenerating the spirit. And the same grace and mercy may surely be dispensed by means of the Holy Communion. By a devout participation of this Sacrament, our faith in the Son of God becomes more lively; our love of God (the bounteous Author of all good things) is more and more increased in our hearts; our charity and Christian affection towards man is more deeply impressed upon our minds; and the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit is more abundantly dispensed: and dispensed for the most benevolent purposes; to enable us to perform our duty, "to walk in love, as Christ also has loved us," and thus to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

If the point of our obedience were merely a question between ourselves, and a fellow-creature; were it, indeed, like many of the Roman Catholic observances, a matter of church discipline, or a

question between the Priest and the people, in such a case we might pause a little, and we might do wisely to enquire, what authority, what foundation there was in Holy Scripture, for our insisting so much on the due celebration, and on the necessary participation of this Holy Communion. If this was merely a question between man and man, we might argue upon it, as long as we pleased. But, this is not the case—far otherwise. In our obedience, or disobedience, it is not man, with whom we have to do; it is with the Lord Jesus Christ, “the appointed Judge of quick and dead.”

When we consider these things, when we reflect, that the Sacrament is His ordinance; who said, “the word that I speak, that shall judge a man at the last day:” (John xii. 48.) concerning whom, God the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.” When we bear these holy scriptures in our remembrance, surely no man can desire, or have the heart to refuse. Who art thou, that repliest against God? Who can gainsay, or resist the words and the command of Jesus Christ?

When this same blessed, and divine Person, shall be seated on the throne of judgement, in all the glory of God the Father; and attended by cherubim and seraphim, by angels and arch-angels, to minister unto him, and to execute his

word: when this awful day comes, (and come it assuredly will) how shall a man in the universe be found, who will refuse to worship him? What will on that day become of all the excuses, and evasions, which men are fond of suggesting to themselves, to justify, as they falsely imagine, a breach of duty, or violation of faith? What have I to do with the vices, or the unworthiness of other people? or, how shall the infirmities of human nature, or the various temptations of the world be brought forward, before the Lord our God, to justify transgression, or disobedience? The word of God is plain, and express: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments of your God." "He that keepeth my word, he it is that loveth Me." "Do this, says Christ, in remembrance of me:" in remembrance of my sufferings, and death upon the cross: in grateful remembrance of that atonement, which I there made for guilty man. Let every man take up his Bible, and read: let him fairly examine, what the apostles and evangelists have recorded, upon the subject of the Sacrament. If we do not study the Bible, we must not be surprised, if we fall into many errors of faith and practice. We shall be judged, not merely by what we do know, but by what we might have known, if it had so pleased us. Let a man, therefore, examine himself: not deceitfully, as before a fellow-creature; but as

before God. "Judge, therefore, yourselves, brethren, as our holy Church speaks, that ye be not judged of the Lord: repent ye truly of your former sins, have a lively faith in Christ our Saviour; amend your lives, and be in perfect charity with all men: so shall ye be meet partakers of these holy mysteries," that is, of this Holy Sacrament—wherein we commemorate the great *mystery* of godliness,—“God manifest in the flesh.” Does not Paul the apostle use these words: (1 Cor. x. 16.) “The bread, which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? The cup, which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?” And shall we not delight in this Holy Communion? Shall we not bless the Lord, who has made our yoke so easy, and the burden of his ordinances so light?

Let us then believe, in all humility, and lowliness of mind, the Gospel of Jesus Christ: let us repent, and amend our lives; let us resolve, by God's blessing, upon a life of better obedience for the time to come: let us cultivate peace and goodwill one with another: let us remember, that true “charity covereth the multitude of sins;” not our own sins, but the sins of our neighbour; and, above all, let us cherish the love of the Lord our God in our hearts and souls. So shall we worthily approach the Lord's Table; so shall we receive, with all thankfulness of mind, the benefit and the blessings of Christian communion.

Thus shall this holy Sacrament be to us the
“savour of life unto life;” and thus shall the
participation of the Lord’s Supper convey to our
souls, the blessing of spiritual strength and com-
fort here, and be the means, under the blessing
of the Most High, of everlasting joy, and endless
happiness, in the kingdom of God.

This may the God of all grace grant to every
penitent and devout christian, to the glory of
God’s holy name, and to the salvation of our souls,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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