

The Children of Light

by
Julius Charles Hare.

Preached before the University of Cambridge on
Advent Sunday 1828.

Preface.

The following sermon is published in deference to a wish expressed by a considerable number of the congregation before whom it was preached. Several of the arguments in it, I am well aware, are crudely developed; and the principles asserted are feebly supported by the proofs: but an attempt to supply these deficiencies would entirely change the nature of the discourse, in which there was so much ground to be traversed, that it could only be done hastily and cursorily.

On one point however I must allow myself a few words. For it has been suggested to me by more than one friend, for whose judgment I have a high respect, that the sentences on the aberrations and extravagances of the reasoning faculty may easily be misconstrued into a dissuasive from all severe exercise of thought: and I have been asked, what guide we are to trust to, if our Reason itself is so apt to lead us astray. Perhaps the



This unabridged text, originally published as *The Children of Light: A Sermon Preacht before the University of Cambridge at St. Mary's Church on Advent Sunday, 1828* (Cambridge: John Smith, 1828), is reprinted from J. C. Hare, *The Victory of Faith, and Other Sermons* (London: Griffith Farran Okeden and Welsh, 1889), 146-72.

ambiguity may result in part from the deficiencies of our philosophical language, which is so wanting in clearness and precision, that we can hardly make sure of being rightly understood, without defining the terms we employ, or even by doing so. The word *Reason*, for instance, is often used to signify the whole complex of our reflective faculties; while at other times it is restricted to the logical faculty, or the power of drawing inferences. In the former sense, Reason is much less likely to err: although even then it needs to be continually refreshed and replenished by influxes from the Imagination, and from the Heart. For in man's spirit, as in his body, the circulation ought to be in constant activity, that no member may be paralysed, but all perpetually recruited and renewed. In the latter sense, on the other hand, Reason has often been a fruitful parent of error and mischief, especially since the middle of the last century: and in this sense I have used the word, when speaking against it. When nothing more than the mere faculty of reasoning, Reason is most fallible; as is proved by the myriads of abortions and misgrowths, which swarm in the history of philosophy and science. This its fallibility does not arise merely, or mainly, from slips of accuracy; though such blunders also, at any link in a chain of argument, render the whole chain brittle and untenable. Reason has erred still more from its neglect of those corrections and adjustments, which must be introduced at every step, before logical inferences can become scientific inductions; and from its precipitance in building up systems, by arbitrarily imposing its own forms on outward objects, instead of searching laboriously among the multitude of those forms for such as will fit them. Yet the first and essential axiom of the Reason is its own infallibility. This infallibility however only belongs to it, while it continues in the regions of pure speculation. The moment it begins to realise and embody its truths, its high prerogative is at an end. Every theorem in geometry is unquestionable: but nothing is easier than to mistake in applying it. The same holds of all other logical propositions. So that the faultiness does not lie in Reason itself: it proceeds from the abuse and misapplication of Reason. Like every other faculty, when rightly exercised, Reason is most beneficial; when wrongly, it may be most injurious. Indeed all intellectual wrong, when traced to its source, will be found to take its rise in moral wrong. If we discover so many *faults*, as the geologists call them, in the structure of our minds, it is because our passions have heaved them out of their places, and destroyed their original integrity and order. Thus, if Reason of late has been somewhat overbearing, the Will has pushed her on. It costs so much less trouble to construct a system out

of one's own brains, than to dig in the quarries of Nature for materials to rear it: the work goes on so much more rapidly: there is something so fascinating in the show of compactness and completeness: and we are all too fond of fancying that Wisdom will spring out of our head, as she is fabled to have sprung out of the divine head, in the fulness of her growth, and the panoply of her power. This delusion is the chief of the errors against which Bacon lifted up his mind: and in the fields of natural philosophy it has been greatly checked by the *Novum Organum*. In moral speculation on the other hand, it has become far more prevalent and pernicious since Bacon's time, than it ever was before. If a call for a great man could avail to make him lift up his head above the mists that are spread over the land, a new Bacon would assuredly arise amongst us, to accomplish in this region, what his forerunner accomplished in the other. Still neither did Bacon discourage men from the exercise of Reason; nor would a follower of Bacon discourage them from it now. To discipline is not to weaken, but to strengthen, by teaching us the right use of our strength. He would only overthrow the tyranny of Reason. He would make it limit, and thereby legalise its authority. He would make it act in consort and co-ordination with our other faculties. Although it is the majestic and regal fountain-head of law, and although it can do no wrong, he would bid it listen to and carefully ponder from which, whether regularly and constitutionally, or irregularly and fragmentarily, it must needs draw all its resources and means of action: and at the same time he would persuade it to surround itself with the lordly splendour and the living energy of the Imagination. For, as the Imagination, if left without restraint to follow its own conceits, is vain and wild, and teems with fantastical superstitions;—as the Understanding, unless other powers elevate and ennoble it, is narrow and partial and empirical and superficial;—thus the Reason is so far from being all-sufficient in itself, that, without the ministerial offices of the other faculties, it has no hold, and is utterly unable to act, upon anything outward. And if, instead of acknowledging the rights of the other faculties, it attempts to trample upon them, it is sure in the end to become the creature and slave of its slaves. Thus, as has been seen in France, it is trodden under foot in its turn by the rankest empiricism and the vilest idolatry, the empiricism of sensuality and the idolatry of negations.

Instead therefore of recommending my young friends, for whose use this sermon was designed, to arrest or impede the progress of their Reason, I would merely exhort them to hold a tight rein over it, to keep it in with a

steady hand; and then to let it bear them along with whatever speed it can put forth. To be run away with would not be the best plan for getting quickly to the spot we want to reach, even if no disaster threatened to interrupt such a course. But while the Reason is cultivated, let not the other faculties be neglected. Let it substantiate its forms, and give them a body of sound experiential and historical knowledge: and let not this body be without the vital warmth of the Affections, nor without the beautiful ever-varying hues, the glowing flushes and the ardent glances of the Imagination. So may it become an edifice wherein Wisdom may not be ashamed to take up her dwelling. No one of the powers with which God has endowed us is useless: no one is meant to lie waste, no one to run wild. Only when they are knit together, and working in unison and harmony, may we hope that the vision of Truth will descend upon them.

Trinity College, December 16th, 1828.

“Ye were sometimes darkness;
but now ye are light in the lord:
walk as children of light.”
— Ephesians v. 8.

We were sometimes darkness; but now we are light. We are most of us only too ready to believe this; and many are not slow to say it. We are prone to believe that we *are light*; and we are not loath to confess that we *were darkness*. Indeed the assumption which vents itself in an exclamation of this sort, is an easy and perpetual, I might almost say a natural and inevitable delusion. All those impulses which lead us to action, tend to make us view the present, whatever it may be, as the paramount object of human interest: and while we are hastening onward, we are careless about what we have left behind. Above all is this wont to be the case during the ardent and hopeful season of youth, when the mind, at least in those who have been endowed with a capacity of receiving speculative truth, yearns after it with impatient longing, and on catching sight of it, or of some phantom wearing its likeness, will rush forward to embrace it with the passionate fervour and prodigal devotedness of a first love. At such an age it cannot be expected

that they, who have never yet been trained by experience duly to estimate the dimensions of things, and to discriminate between what they are and what they appear to be,—it cannot be expected that they, who have never been taught to limit their hopes, to distrust the stirrings of their affections, or to set bounds to their confidence,—should anticipate the calmer and more measured judgment of maturer years; that they should refrain from attaching a disproportionate importance to that which for the moment is wholly engrossing them. One cannot expect,—scarcely ought one to wish,—that the brilliancy of the youthful eye should be dimmed by the lacklustre discretion of age. Nor is it to be wondered at,—nor, if the delusion were confined to ourselves, if we were not so apt to presume that the same change from darkness to light, which we suppose to have taken place in our own intellects, must also have taken place in the world, would it be much to be regretted,—that every fresh light, which at such an age is let in upon the mind, should so dazzle its unpractised organs, as to make it fancy that it has hitherto been wandering in darkness, and has only now at length suddenly come forth for the first time into the full noon-day light and radiance of heaven. Doubtless the snake must often cheat itself with the vain belief that its slough has already been cast off. Doubtless the insect, in which Philosophy has delighted to contemplate the symbol of the emancipated soul, must many a time fondly imagine that the term of its imprisonment is already arrived, that its shell is falling away, and that it is already rising out of the state, in which its doom was to creep and crawl about the earth, into a life of paradisiacal innocence and playfulness and freedom and joy.

I would not therefore severely reprehend a delusion of this kind, so long as it is nothing worse than an overflowing of ardent admiration for the new light which has just been dawning upon us. But we can never transgress, however slightly, with impunity. The moment we stray out of the right path, we are beset by a crowd of temptations, which previously durst not show themselves, but which now lure us further and further away from it. Indeed it is mostly by excess in something which seemed to be good, that the better natures, among those who have ended in becoming children of evil, originally set out in their devious course. For Satan has not forgotten his old craft: he well knows that there are many, whom in no way can he so easily inveigle, as by transforming himself into an angel of light. The delusion I have been speaking of may at first betoken nothing more reprehensible than a somewhat extravagant and ill-regulated enthusiasm. But ere long, unless it be checked, worse vices will cluster around it.

Nothing is more flattering, or more congenial to our vanity, nothing more likely to foment it, than the notion that we have just been accomplishing something extraordinary. For vanity, according to its perishable ephemeral nature, is mostly ready to give up our past selves, and not unwilling to look back on them with scorn, in order that it may perch with a more confident tenacity, grinning self-complacently, on our present selves. It is ready to sacrifice everything, even the choicest recollections of our own past lives, in the reckless delirium of its self-idolatry. There is something estimable on the other hand, something reverential, and almost sacred, in that form of self-love,—if I may be allowed to rescue this word from the ignominy which in its customary acceptation it amply deserves,—in that sober, meditative, meek self-respect, which fixes on the more enduring parts of our being, and dwells with fondness on the remotest recollections of the past, in proportion as they have any of that permanence, which cannot belong to anything corrupt. Such feelings belong to our immortal nature, to our continuous indestructible self-consciousness, which could not exist without them, and which would be bare and barren unless it cherished them. They are the blossoms which are ever dropping from the higher branches, as tokens of love and thankfulness, upon the roots. Nor are they ever found in freshness and vigour, except in the gentler, the less worldly-minded, in those whose hearts have neither been hardened by their selfishness, nor hollowed out by their vices. Persons of this character will not be led hastily to despise the whole of their antecedent existence as darkness, nor to exult and boast that the veil has now at once been completely withdrawn, and that they are basking beneath the unclouded meridian splendour of truth. They will have too great a reverence for their past, and too wholesome a distrust of their present selves. Indeed there is hardly any sign, which so clearly shows that a life has been spent in somewhat of harmony with the voice of Duty, and not unblest by its smiles, as when we see the aged, after the storms of mid-life have subsided, look back with lively and thankful remembrance to the springs of innocent joy, which gushed spontaneously out of their hearts in the years of their child-hood.

Among the young however, few, at least of those in whom anything is teeming, are of this mood. The sudden and violent changes, which we often see in their minds, and which in them are natural and excusable, and may easily be commendable, are not seldom accompanied by a vehement dislike, and almost contempt, for whatever is akin to the notions they formerly held. They are apt to fancy they have sprung up all at once, from a

state of nonage and ignorance, into the full maturity of approved wisdom; while in fact they are merely bowing down to the newest idol of the day, and joining in the fanatical worship of the latest paradox cast up by the eddying waves of popular opinion. Moreover, by a confusion and transfer not uncommon, when the mind perceives nothing in the world around it except its own image and reflection, they will assume with little scruple, that a change answerable to the one within their own breasts must also have been going on at the same time in others,—that all mankind have till now been lying under the same thick darkness, from which they have just escaped, and that all mankind must have been passing in like manner out of that darkness into light, or that, if they have not, they ought to be dragged and driven.

It is the frequency of this very delusion, that has given our age its revolutionary character. We have asserted that *we are light*, and that *we were darkness*, with equal eagerness and vehemence. In so doing we have been emboldened by the exclusive dominion which, during the last half century, Reason has usurped over all our other faculties. The absolute supremacy of Reason, that is, of certain logical processes, in the concerns of mankind having once been acknowledged, Reason too, according to the usual fate of despots, became a tyrant: nor was there any act of tyranny, however irrational, that she shrank from committing. Although in no operations, as in this place we know well are errors more likely to occur, or often more difficult to be detected, still Reason is at once so headstrong and so heartless, that no consideration for her own infirmity, or for that of others, will deter her from pursuing her course. If her career has not been attended in all countries with the same convulsions, which in some have overthrown the whole fabric of society, and swept away every ancient institution, this has not been owing to any relenting or to any self-control, on her part, but to the checks imposed on her by feelings which are not so easily misled, and by the loyal attachment to hereditary usages and to inviolable rights. Still in England also have there been numerous examples of a like infatuation, no less active, though hitherto less destructive. Witness the wild and dreary day-dreams of our political system-mongers,—the audacious and baseless fabrics which have been thrust up in defiance of all sound moral and speculative philosophy,—the mechanical schemes of education, which have taken everything into account, except that the beings they had to deal with were children, and that the beings they had to form were to be men. This place, and the limits I am bound to set to this

sermon, prevent my citing particular cases: nor is it requisite. Every thoughtful observer will have registered many such in his memory. He will call to mind the various short roads to universal knowledge, the multifarious panaceas against moral and political evil, to which we have been invited year after year, which have found their votaries and their victims, and after a while have been abandoned and forgotten: or at all events that which was proclaimed as the groundwork of a new era, has had its overweening pretensions curtailed, and has been employed in the subordinate station for which it was fitted. For the progress of the error has mostly been the same. A solution had been discovered for some one, or for some few particular problems,—a clue to some one particular chamber or closet in the vast impermeable labyrinth of knowledge,—a remedy which might charm or quell some one among the tumultuous insurgent swarm of human diseases. Hereupon the discoverer straightway persuaded himself, that, having done one thing, he had done everything,—that he had found a solution for every insoluble problem, a clue to the whole of the labyrinth, a nostrum for every form of disease: and these assumptions have been accompanied, as was natural, by a contemptuous rejection of all other methods, however long established and approved. The boast of the age has been, not merely that we are wiser than our ancestors, but that, while we are perfectly wise and clear-sighted, our ancestors were utterly ignorant and blind. Often too they who have reached one step higher on some one of the ladders of knowledge, dizzied by their elevation, have madly cut the ladder in sunder, for the sake of breaking off all connexion with those on whom they were scornfully looking down; forgetting that only by the help of that connexion could they ever have mounted so high, and that the moment it is dissolved they must fall to the ground; forgetting that all human improvement must be gradual,—that we can only advance step by step,—that there is no absolute beginning upon earth,—that the law of continuity cannot be infringed,—that the chain of causes and effects cannot be broken; forgetting in fine that, if the earth were to be stripped of her heavenly mantle, and left naked in bare space, she would never be able, by her own revolutionary energy, to pass from darkness into light,—and that all that her children can do for her is to kindle a feeble flickering distorting glare, no glimpse of which can be descried beyond a very narrow range.

If therefore we are indeed to pass from darkness into light, the light must have another, an unearthly, a superterraneous source. Now wherever an error or a folly has exercised a wide influence, we may be sure that it must

have been the parody or caricature of some truth: and its extensive influence has mainly been owing to the likeness of this truth, which, however unconsciously, was discerned in it, notwithstanding the disfigurement. At least it is only when an error is akin to some truth, which it misrepresents and misapplies, that its consequences are much to be dreaded. For so weak and grovelling is error, it can never lift up its head, unless it can find some truth to cling and climb round; although, in climbing round, it may stunt and stifle that truth. Thus, in the delusion we have been speaking of, there is much that is right and well-grounded, along with what is erroneous and wrong. Our dissatisfaction with our former selves is well-grounded. Indeed a dissatisfaction of the character described will never be found, except where there is ample reason for it. Only it would do better to express itself more meekly: nor ought it to stop short with the past: it ought to spread out its shade over the present, to keep that from being quite scorched up. It ought to put off all resemblance to that sorrow of this world, which only worketh death,—which would lead us to slay and to bury the past, and to trample on its grave: and it ought to put on the form of that godly sorrow, which worketh repentance unto salvation. True again is it, that we have been sitting in darkness: but so are we still. Unless a hand from above has burst through the darkness, and scattered it, we must still be sitting in darkness. The blaze we may have lit up roundabout us sends forth no genuine genial light: it will soon have burnt itself out: and the darkness will then become deeper, and more deeply felt, than before. Nor is our longing for light a wrong feeling: nor are we wrong in our eager joy to welcome the faintest gleam of it. Our error lies in persisting to wait on the earthborn partial flame, after we are aware, or may and ought to be aware, that it is nothing better; in fancying that the great object of life is already in our grasp, that the prize is already won; in counting that we have already apprehended, instead of forgetting the things hitherto attained, and pressing incessantly onward to the things which still lie and ever will lie before us.

In what sense then, and under what limitations, may it be said of us, that we *were sometimes darkness, and now are light*? What must we do, what must befall us, in order that we too may be partakers in this blessed and glorious change? For assuredly the words of the Apostle are not addressed to the Ephesians exclusively. In a certain sense they apply to every faithful member of Christ's Church. It is true, the transition in our days cannot be equally sudden and striking and splendid. The rising of the

Sun of Righteousness cannot now be such as the rising of His visible symbol is said to be in tropical regions. It cannot be such as it was at that tropical epoch in the history of the world. It cannot be so instantaneous, so complete, such an immediate revelation and all-pervading effulgence of God's glory. Nor can we hear the morning song of the angels, hailing the new-born Daystar. Our burst of light cannot be so strong; nor can our darkness be so thick. For, slight as one the whole we may deem the efficacy of Christianity to have been on the body politic of mankind, in straightening the wry and joining the dislocated limbs,—slight as that efficacy may have been, in comparison with what it ought to have been, and would have been, unless the Spirit of Evil, after signally failing in his reiterated efforts to crush and overthrow Christianity by open force, had subtilely, and alas! far more successfully, hit on a different device, and had tried to gain by undermining, what he could not carry by storm, and had risen up from beneath in the heart of the temple itself, and had set up his standard therein, the abomination of desolation in the holy place;—still,—notwithstanding all that man's vices have done to taint and impair this greatest of God's blessings, and to keep us from feeding on it as the manna, and inhaling it as the breath of life,—so much has nevertheless been accomplished,—so many tapers have been kindled at this celestial flame,—so much in our social institutions bears the seal and image, indistinct and evanescent though it may be, of Christ,—so many crosses have been set up by godly men amid the wilds and wastes of human speculation, reminding the wayfarer, at every turn, of the things which ought ever to be uppermost in his thoughts,—that,—supposing, what, God be praised! in this country there is no ground for supposing, that fathers and mothers were generally altogether unmindful of their first and highest duty, the duty of giving back to God the child that God has given to them,—yet even then it would scarcely be possible for any one to grow up amongst us, without being called in some way or other to the nurture and admonition of the Lord, without having his heart and mind awakened by manifold tokens and memorials of his Maker and of his Saviour, and without being incited now and then to look in, were it merely from curiosity, at the glory which in old times was revealed to mankind. For still that glory is abiding upon the earth; and still even in these days we may behold it, if we endeavour resolutely and perseveringly to purge our eyes from the film which by nature darkens their vision. Owing to these reasons, the transition in our days cannot be so manifest, or so broadly marked. We are too well off for it to be so. Yet it may be, that this our vantage-ground

may in many cases turn out to be a dangerous precipice. It may be, that the twilight around us, whereby the gloom of our condition is less palpable and oppressive, may often rather check than animate our desire for something brighter and better: so that, being born in a state of comparative light, we may be the more readily contented to abide in a state of comparative darkness: and then, as twilight is never stationary, but ever either waxing into day, or waning into night, our inward light, from our want of diligence in tending it, will become fainter and fainter, until at length it goes out unperceived. For of this we may be assured: there is no loitering on the threshold of heaven. Those whom God's grace has brought thither, must go onward in the strength of faith: or ere long the flaming sword of the angel will drive them away, and perchance for ever. If on the other hand we do go onward, in that strength which alone will enable us to do so, the strength of faith,—if we do what in us lies to ensure that our twilight shall be the forerunner of day, not of night,—if we turn our hearts and souls with faith and patience eastward, and watch diligently for the rising of the Daystar,—this twilight,—which, if less dark, is not less chill, nay, may often be more chill, than night, but with a chillness producing little of refreshment, and which, though still without the sun, has been stripped of the stars, and has neither the warm gladdening sunshine of Christianity, nor the dim mysterious mystical starlight of heathenism,—this twilight will seem poor and cold and blank, when contrasted with the glory of the fully uprisen day. Indeed the transition is such, we shall feel and acknowledge that it has verily been a passing from darkness into light. We shall feel that the words in which St. Paul reminds the Ephesians of the inestimable blessing they had received, may with perfect propriety be applied to ourselves.

For this is in truth and in the fullest sense a transformation. The only way in which man can really pass from spiritual darkness into spiritual light, is when his eyes are opened to behold the light of the Gospel shining upon him,—that light which in these days encompasses us all from our birth, but to which many continue blind for years, not a few, it is to be feared, all their lives;—when that true light, which lighteth every man who cometh into the world, bursts through the dark shroud with sin casts over it, and burns up into a pure and steady flame, and manifests its affinity to heaven. All other changes in man are merely of degree, from more to less, or from less to more. We may improve the talents which have been committed to us; or we may waste them. We may extend our wanderings further and further on the sphere of human knowledge: but the utmost we can

accomplish is to return from another quarter to the spot from which we started, having merely made the round of the globe, without once setting foot out of or beyond it. Search as diligently, as curiously, as you may, with the most strenuous desire to glorify the works and the powers of man, the more thorough-going your search is, the more it will convince you that the only new element, which has been grafted into nature since the creation, is the religion of Christ,—that this is the one sole absolute beginning, since man was first cast on the waters of Time, the one sole second birth of the world. So that it is not arbitrarily, but with sound reason, that even in our chronology we refer to the coming of our Lord, as the epoch from which all subsequent events are to be dated. For that coming has given a new character to the history of the world, a new tone and spirit to the destinies of mankind.

That this must be the Apostle's meaning,—that Christ is the light which had risen upon the Ephesians, and brought them out of their former darkness,—would be plain from the uniform language of Scripture, even if St. Paul had not expressly added, that they had become light *in the Lord*. It is as a Light, *seen by the people who walked in darkness, and shining upon those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death*, that he, who in a more especial manner was the prophet of the Gospel, announced the advent for the Prince of Peace. It is as *the Dayspring from on high, visiting us to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death*, that Zacharias, when his tongue was loosed, spake of Him before whose face the infant Baptist was to walk. It is as *the Light of men, shining in darkness, but uncomprehended by the darkness*, that the beloved disciple describes the operation of the Eternal Word. In like manner did He, of whom all the prophets and evangelists bear witness, He in whom they were all summed up, declare of Himself: *As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*: where again, as throughout, we find the same contrast between the light which Christ pours on the world, and the darkness through which the world, when without Christ, has to roll and grope its way. Nor is this a mere poetical image, as it may perchance be deemed by those whose sight has been weakened by wandering too long amid the glittering tinsel of a trifling fancy: it is not an illustration picked arbitrarily out of a thousand others, which might have served the purpose equally well: it is an essential everlasting type. And such, if we examine them thoughtfully, we shall perceive, is mostly the character of the images used in the Bible. They are

the beautiful blossoms, which enfold and embosom the nourishing fruits of human wisdom, and the vital germs of divine wisdom. They are generally taken from those symbols or emblems by which Nature shows forth the Will of her Almighty Author: and as His Will is one, so is there a corresponding harmony and unity in its various manifestations. You have often been advised to study the Mosaic Law, for the types of Christ contained in it. You have often been recommended to examine the history of the Jews, for the matters typical of Christ contained in it. Let me exhort you to search also for like types in another book, a book penned by the same hand which guided the inspired penmen of the Bible, the book of God's Creation. So will you learn to look at Nature as you ought to look, to discern something more than the ever-changing colours and ever-waving folds of her garments, to catch sight of those capital features in which her spirit is most visibly expressed, nay, to pierce through her body to her soul, or rather to behold the workings of her soul in all the movements of her body. So will you learn to discover something more than the mere properties of space and time, lines and numbers, in her laws. So will you learn to breathe life into the dry bones of your natural philosophy. To the godly, holding converse with Nature is holding converse with God. It is to them as another and a prior Bible; which, when man's secondary writing has been rubbed off, and when the original characters are brought out and deciphered and rightly interpreted, as with the help of the other they may be, unites from all its regions and spheres in declaring the glory of God, and in showing His handiwork. By such a course of study alone shall we be enabled to dive, at least some way, into the meaning of that mysterious declaration, when, on the eve of the heavenly sabbath, God saw everything that He had made, and beheld that it was very good; or to apprehend how all this too has fallen away from original goodness, how the earth was involved in the original curse, and how the whole creation is groaning and travailing in pain together, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. To what end indeed have we been endowed with the creative faculty of the Imagination, which, glancing from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven, vivifies what to the eye seems lifeless, animates what to the eye seems torpid, combines and harmonizes what to the eye seems broken and disjointed, and infuses a soul, without thought and feeling, with determinate purpose and submissive beneficence, into the multitudinous fleeting phantasmagoria of the senses? to what end, I ask, have we been so richly endowed? unless, as the prime object and appointed task of the Reason is to detect and apprehend the laws by which

the Almighty Law-giver upholds and rules the world He has created, it be in like manner the province and duty of the Imagination to be diligent in reading and studying the symbolical characters, wherewith God has engraven the revelations of His goodness on the interminable scroll of the visible universe. Both the one power and the other, when rightly employed, will be the active and dutiful handmaids of Religion. They will enable us to recognise the traces of God's wisdom, of His goodness, and of His overruling providence, in all the objects around us, in the lowest, no less than in the highest. Thus to the truly pious mind all things become animated with a divine spirit. Whatever he sees is to him a memorial of God. He lives with the wakeful consciousness that he is always in the sight of God. He beholds God's eye watching over him in the midst of his business and of his pastime. He feels that God is ever near him, the hearer of all his secret thoughts and breathless meditations. Above all will he thankfully bear in mind, that God's sun, which shines upon him from the sky, at the same time that it is the great source of our earthly blessings, is likewise the type and image of that Son of God, who is the great source of our heavenly blessings; who once manifested Himself, and came down on earth, and poured His blessed light over the whole face of human nature; and who still does so by the Gospel of His earnest prayer for light, but it will be granted to them with a fulness of glory far above what they could ever have expected or conceived.

Christ then being the one great source of all spiritual light, let us consider, although it must needs be briefly and slightly, one or two of the particulars in which the coming of Christ has actually wrought the change spoken of by the Apostle, and brought us out of darkness into light. Let us look at the light He has cast over the nature, the destinies, and the duties of man: as to which we may satisfy ourselves, that He has indeed illumined what before was dark, that He has raised and supported what was low. On the one hand Christianity lays open what God has done for us, and what He designs for us. On the other hand it has taught us what we ought to do, in order to show forth our thankfulness for the mercies we have received, and that we may not be found so utterly unworthy, as to exclude ourselves from the blessedness which has been prepared for us.

With regard to both these questions, the two questions of the greatest importance and deepest interest which can engage men's thoughts, little was to be found before the coming of our Lord, at least in those nations which stood without the pale of the Jewish Church, except perplexity involved within perplexity, and uncertainly piled upon uncertainty. The

past was dark and wild and dreamlike. The future was gloomy and desolate and spectral, and would have been a blank void, unless it had been peopled by the phantasmal brood of inextinguishable hopes and irrepressible fears. The idea of a future state, such as it circulated in the popular belief, having been handed down, though not without a continual transmutation, from ages which appear to have caught the last echoes of a primeval tradition,—this idea had been so grossly corrupted, and had become so carnal,—more like the visions of a distempered sleep, than the aspirations of a pure and devout imagination,—that the thoughtful could only be withheld from altogether rejecting it, by looking down into the abyss of despair into which such a rejection plunged them. The unquenchable hope of immortality planted in man's heart looked anxiously around for something external that might justify and support it; for bare Reason could not do so. Indeed so far is Reason from affording any assurance of a blessed immortality, that a blessed immortality, without a mediator, without an atonement, is rather repugnant to Reason. Not that Reason could have devised such a mediation, could have thought of such a reconciling solution for the startling difficulty which stared it in the face at the end of the prospect of human nature; although, when such a scheme is set before it, Reason, if rightly exercised, may recognise its fitness and sufficiency. Indeed the business of Reason is not so much to divine what is not shown, as to discern and exhibit the consistency of that which is shown. When man's inborn feelings claimed and thirsted for a personal immortality, Reason could not administer anything to allay such a desire. Yet until it became ossified, as a consequence of cutting itself off from communion with the affections, Reason would rather have denied itself, than abjured this claim, or stifled this thirst. In her brightest and healthiest days, Philosophy tried to find a solace and support in the instinctive voice of human nature, in that unconscious contagion which has given all our nobler feelings a grasp beyond the span of our earthly life, and in those ancestral opinions sanctioned by hereditary ceremonies, and those immemorial articles of popular belief, which in many cases seem to be groundless, only because they are unfathomable. Even entering and joining the giddy masquerade, in which Poetry had dressed up the religious affections, the superhuman longings of the heart,—even this was better than to sit down on the outside shivering in forlorn and homeless destitution,—better than to divert our aspirations after eternity from their rightful object, and transform them, as too many among the best and noblest spirits transformed them, into cravings for an

earthly immortality of fame,—better, ten thousand times better, than to lull and extinguish them, drowning the intellectual and spiritual in the animal sensual nature.

Such being man's knowledge, or rather his ignorance, concerning his own future destiny, no less dim and shadowy and misshapen and fleeting were his notions of God, and of the relation in which man and nature stand to their common Author and Governor. It is true, some of the purest and most eagle-sighted minds among the heathens did occasionally, in moments of something like a higher inspiration, dart their glances far beyond the reach of their countrymen, and would seem almost to have caught glimpses of the radiance which surrounds the Throne of Truth. Never would I deny this: never would I disparage this. For surely there is something timid and mean-spirited and almost dastardly, or at all events most unchristian, in the course adopted by many advocates of Christianity, who have done their utmost to slur over and depreciate and detract from whatever has been accomplished by human thought and genius. In the ancient apologists such a procedure might be justifiable: for their business with heathenism was to overthrow it, by showing the abominations which it necessarily involved. But in our days it is no less unfair, no less dishonest, to pick out these abominations as the sole characteristics of the ages anterior to Christ, that it would be to identify Christianity, as her enemies have done, with the evils which, even under her blessed light, have sprung up so plentifully from the corrupt soil of human nature. Reviling the creature is not the only, and scarcely the best way of glorifying the Creator. The Gospel does not fear any competition. It has no need to take any ungenerous advantage of its rival. It will grant man all that he has done: it will even accept the will for the deed, and grant him all that he has earnestly striven to do: and still, beautiful and noble and sublime as may be the truths which man had unveiled, a few simple words from the lips of the Saviour will far excel them all. But why go along with vulgar usage in talking of rivalry and competition? There is nothing of the sort. Christ did not come to contend with man as an adversary. He came only to contend with that which is bad in human nature. He came to succour and encourage and foster whatever is good in it. Instead of throwing the achievements of human genius into the shade, through fear of their derogating from the glory of Christ, I would rather gather them around His footstool. I would regard them as relics of man's better nature, as broken rays of the glory with which he was originally crowned, as gleams of that twilight which was to

precede and to prepare the eye for the sunrise of the Gospel. Nay, whatsoever I could discover in the works and thoughts of man, anterior to the Gospel, yet in harmony with the spirit of the Gospel, I would welcome as a fresh assurance that the Gospel is in harmony with the immortal part of man's nature, with that portion of God's image, which had not been wholly effaced. Indeed, if there had not been something congenial and responsive to Christianity in the heart of man, in vain would Christianity have called to him. Her voice must have fallen unfelt, as music on the deaf, and light on the blind. Nevertheless, as was observed above, Christianity was really an absolute beginning, not merely a new step in the progressive development of mankind. It did not collect and combine the fragments of truth which were already scattered about the world, but came at once from the divine Source of all Truth; from whom also whatsoever of truth had previously been discerned by man, was in one way or other derived. Thus the creation of man was the absolute beginning of a new period in the history of the earth; although in the various tribes of animals, and even in inanimate nature, there had been many foreshowings, much looking out, so to say, for him who was to be their lord,—for him in whom what was potential in them should be realised and fulfilled. So too is the rising of the sun an absolute beginning in the history of the day, and a passing from darkness to light, though stars may be seen sprinkled about before his rising: for the stars do not prevent its being dark: they give no warmth: they shew no light to work by. Let us admit the utmost that can be admitted: still the truths which man had unravelled or uncovered, were insulated, were partial and imperfect, were narrow and confined, were almost powerless: they were merely speculative, and wanted that certain and stable sanction which alone can make a truth practically effective: they did not act on the generality at all: they were mostly restricted to a few gifted minds: their influence was seldom great, except upon such as had been personally blessed with the vision which revealed them: the disciple soon converted them into a mere scaffolding of ingenious technicalities: the unlearned were strangers to them: the lowly knew nothing of them: they never visited the cottage: it was reserved for the Son of God to perform the godlike task of preaching the Gospel to the poor.

The course of the argument would now lead me to inquire in what manner Christianity has enlightened the path of our duty, and has cleared it of the difficulties and impediments wherewith in the ancient world it was beset. And here again it would appear, that, while we may with sincere gratitude and admiration acknowledge the wisdom manifested in some

ancient systems of ethics, those systems from their very nature, from the grounds they rested on, the motives they appealed to, and the logical processes they implied, were ill fitted for swaying and disciplining the will of the bulk of mankind;—indeed they hardly aimed at doing so;—that, like the religious ideas before spoken of, they were mainly speculative, and, as such, of little effect;—for whatever was truly great and noble in the conduct of the ancients was inspired by very different and far more powerful principles;—that they were wanting in integrity, there being hardly one of them which was not more or less polluted by some foul and abominable stain; and that even what was best in them was imperfect, from the impossibility of reconciling morality with headstrong lawless affections, and with an unhallowed religion, or of keeping it alive, if wholly severed from them. It would appear likewise that all these inconsistencies and contradictions, these struggles between the jarring parts of our nature, have been atoned by Christ, when He identified the discharge of our duties with the plenary indulgence of our purest and holiest affections,—for holy they became through His consecration; when He set forth their original unity, and showed how every breach of that unity is injurious and destructive to both; and when He declared that the energetic exercise of our whole moral nature in this its unity is the highest outward expression of our worship to God, thereby converting the inanimate statue of heathen virtue into the living body of Christian godliness. I ought further to consider, how far what has been said concerning the Gentiles will apply to the Jews, and to what extent and in what respects the coming of Christ was to them also the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. But these inquiries would carry me too far. Indeed the subject I have entered upon is so vast and multifarious, that it would require several sermons to follow out the many important questions which arise out of it. Far however as we might pursue them, we should come at last to the very same conclusion, to which the foregoing investigation has led us,—that, notwithstanding the sublime speculative ideas of Philosophy, and the beautiful allegorical fables of Poetry,—if the belief we seek for be one which is to take deep root in the heart, to command the assent of the reason, and to control the motions of the will, one which is not to be confined to the rapture of the poet, or the trance of the philosopher, but to spread from highest to lowest, and from lowest to highest, ennobling all, humbling all, purifying and sanctifying all,—if such be the belief we seek for, it is impossible not to recognise the justice of St. Paul's declaration, that our Saviour Jesus Christ first brought life as well as immortality, to light

through the Gospel; even as it is through Him alone that we can know or come to the Father.

Nor, if such was the case in St. Paul's days, has it ceased to be so since. Still, as then, it is on the Gospel that we must rest our assurance of immortality. Still, as then, it is from the Gospel that we must draw our faith in God, and our knowledge of God. Still, as then, it is from the Gospel that we must learn to mould the heart, and to sway the will. Beware therefore, my brethren, lest you be beguiled by vain wisdom and false philosophy into fancying that there can be any sure hope, or any stable faith, or any pure love, except such as springs from the seed sown by the heavenly Sower. Beware lest you be ever tempted to let slip the anchor of your faith in Christ. There may be a deceitful calm for the moment. It may seem, amid the unruffled tranquility which you are here allowed to enjoy, as if the storms had been charmed, and had forgotten how to rage; as if all danger were over once for all; and as if every other creek must be as secure as the haven you are now moored in. There may be something fascinating too in the thought of escaping from the bondage, in which you may fancy you have hitherto been held, and of disporting yourselves freely with all your sails outspread, to catch every fresh breeze of truth. But sooner or later, be assured, the winds and waves will lift themselves up, and will hurry you irresistibly along, and will bear you you know not whither. Unless you abide beneath the light of the Sun of Righteousness, the words of the Apostle will in your case be reversed. Whereas you were light, you will be darkness: and the darkness which of late years has enveloped such as have shut their eyes against the Gospel, has been no less gross than the very worst which the Gospel at its rising chased away.

Let me suppose however that you have a righteous dread of such darkness. Let me suppose that you never have been, or that, if you once were, you are now no longer under it. Let me suppose that, to the full extent of the Apostle's meaning, you are indeed light in the Lord. What follows? Is this enough? Are you already become masters in Christianity? Have you nothing more to do, than to lie basking beneath the light, and to let it shine upon you? What profits the light of day to the sluggard who slumbers on his bed? And what can the light of Christianity profit you, if, after staring at it idly for a while, you throw yourself back upon the couch of your former nature, and relapse into the drowsy torpor of your ancient habits, or try to lure back the dreamy excitements of the vices which have hitherto charmed you? Nothing; yea, worse than nothing. It can only make your darkness

visible: it can only serve to discover sights of woe: it can only deepen your condemnation. When the gentle touch of morning light draws back your eyelids, it admonishes you of the labours and the duties of the day, and summons you to arise and discharge them. A like admonition is conveyed by the gentle touch of the light of the Gospel, when it draws back the lids of your souls, and enables you to behold the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Accordingly an inference to this effect is drawn by St. Paul in our text. Having told the Ephesians, that they, who had sometimes been darkness, had now become light in the Lord, he commands them to walk as children of light.

Walk as children of light. This is the simple and beautiful substance of your Christian duty. This is your bright privilege, which, if you use it according to the grace whereby you have received it, will be a prelude and foretaste of the bliss and glory of heaven. It is to light that all nations and languages have had recourse, whenever they wanted a symbol for anything excellent in glory: and if we were to search through the whole inanimate nature for an emblem of pure unadulterated happiness, where could we find such an emblem, except in light? traversing the illimitable regions of space with a speed surpassing that of thought, incapable of injury or stain, and, whithersoever it goes, showering beauty and gladness. In order however that we may in due time inherit the whole fulness of this radiant beatitude, we must begin by training and fitting ourselves for it. Nothing good burst forth all at once. The lightning may dart out of a black cloud: but the day sends his bright heralds before him, to prepare the world for his coming. So should we endeavour to render our lives here on earth as it were the dawn of heaven's eternal day: we should endeavour to walk as children of light. Our thoughts and feelings should all be akin to light, and have something of the nature of light in them: and our actions should be like the action of light itself, and like the actions of all those powers and of all those beings which pertain to light, and may be said to form the family of light; while we should carefully abstain and shrink from all such works as pertain to darkness, and are wrought by those who may be called the brood of darkness.

Thus the children of light will walk as having the light of knowledge, steadfastly, firmly, right onward to the end that is set before them. When men are walking in the dark, through an unknown and roadless country, they walk insecurely, doubtingly, timidly. For they cannot see where they are treading: they are fearful of stumbling against a stone, or falling into a

pit: they cannot even keep on for many steps certain of the course they are taking. But by day we perceive what is under us and about us; we have the end of our journey, or at least the quarter where it lies, full in view; and we are able to make for it by the safest and speediest way. The very same advantage, as we have seen, have those who are light in the Lord, the children of spiritual light, over the children of spiritual darkness. They know whither they are going: to heaven. They know how they are to get there: by Him who has declared Himself to be the Way; by keeping His words, by walking in His paths, by trusting in His atonement. If you then are children of light, if you know all this, walk according to your knowledge, without stumbling or slipping, without swerving or straying, without loitering or dallying by the way, onward and ever onward, beneath the light of the Sun of Righteousness, on the road which leads to heaven.

In the next place the children of light are upright, and honest, and straightforward, and open, and frank, in all their dealings. There is nothing like lurking or concealment about them, nothing like dissimulation, nothing like fraud or deceit. These are the ministers and the spawn of darkness. It is darkness that hides its face, lest any should be appalled by so dismal a sight: light is the revealer and manifester of all things. It lifts up its brow on high, that all may behold it: for it is conscious that it has nothing to dread, that the breath of shame cannot soil it. Whereas the wicked lie in wait and roam through the dark, and screen themselves therein from the sight of the sun; as though the sun were the only eye wherewith God can behold their doings. It is under the cover of night that the reveller commits his foulest acts of intemperance and debauchery. It is under the cover of night that the thief and the murderer prowls about, to bereave his brother of his substance or of his life. These children of darkness seek the shades of darkness, to hide themselves thereby from the eyes of their fellow-creatures, from the eyes of heaven, nay, even from their own eyes, from the eye of conscience, which at such a season they find it easier to hoodwink and blind. They on the other hand, who walk abroad and ply their tasks during the day, are those by whose labour their brethren are benefited and supported; those who make the earth yield her increase, or who convert her produce into food and clothing, or who minister to such wants as spring up in countless varieties beneath the march of civilised society. Nor is this confined to men: the brute animals seem to be under a similar instinct. The beasts of prey lie in their lair during the daytime, and wait for sunset ere they sally out on their destructive wanderings; while the beneficent and

household animals, those which are most useful and friendly to man, are like him in a certain sense children of light, and come forth and go to rest with the sun. They who are conscious of no evil wish or purpose, do not shun or shrink from the eyes of others: though never forward in courting notice, they bid it welcome when it chooses to visit them. Our Saviour Himself tells us, that *the condemnation of the world* lies in this, that *although light has come into the world, yet men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil*. Nothing but their having utterly depraved their nature could seduce them into loving what is so contrary and repugnant to it. *For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, nor cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God*. To the same effect He commands His disciples *to let their light so shine before men, that they may see their good works*, not however for any vain ostentatious selfish purpose,—this would have been directly against the whole spirit of His teaching,—but in order that men may be moved thereby to glorify God.

For the children of light are also meek and lowly. Even the sun, although he stands up on high, and drives his chariot across the heavens, rather averts observation from himself than attracts it. His joy is to glorify his Maker, to display the beauty and magnificence and harmony and order of all the works of God. So far however as it is possible for him, he withdraws himself from the eyes of mankind; not indeed in darkness, wherein the wicked hide their shame; but in excess of light, wherein God Himself veils His glory. And if we look at the other children of light, that host of white-robed pilgrims that travel across the vault of the nightly sky, the imagination is unable to conceive anything quieter and calmer and more unassuming. They are the exquisite and perfect emblems of meek loveliness and humility in high station. It is only the spurious lights of earth, the fires whereby the earth would mimic the lights of heaven, that glare and flare and challenge attention to themselves; while, instead of illumining the darkness, beyond their immediate neighbourhood, they merely make it thicker and more palpable; as these lights alone vomit smoke; as these alone ravage and consume.

Again, the children of light are diligent and orderly and unweariable in the fulfilment of their duties. Here also they take a lesson from the sun; who pursues the path that God has marked out for him, and pours daylight on whatever is beneath him from his everlasting inexhaustible fountains, and

causes the wheel of the seasons to turn round, and summer and winter to perform their annual revolutions, and has never been behindhand in his task, and never slackens, nor faints, nor pauses; nor ever will pause, until the same hand which launched him on his way, shall again stretch itself forth to arrest his course. All the children of light are careful to follow their Master's example, and *to work his works while it is day*: for they know that the night of the grave cometh, when no man can work, and that, unless they are working the works of light, when that night overtakes them, darkness must be their portion for ever.

The children of light are likewise pure. For light is not only the purest of all sensuous things, so pure that nothing can defile it; but whatever else is defiled, is brought to the light; and the light purifies it. And the children of light know that, although whatever darkness may cover them will be no darkness to God, it may and will be darkness to themselves. They know that, although no impurity in which they can bury their souls will be able to hind them from the sight of God, yet it will utterly hide God from their sight. They know that it is only by striving to purify their own hearts, even as God is pure, that they can at all fit themselves for the beatific vision which Christ has promised to the pure in heart.

Cheerfulness too is a never-failing characteristic of those who are truly children of light. For is not light at once the most joyous of all things, and the enlivener and gladdener of all nature, animate and inanimate, the dispeller of sickly cares, the calmer of restless disquietudes? Is it not as a bridegroom that the sun comes forth from his chamber? and does he not rejoice as a giant to run his course? Does not all nature grow bright the moment he looks upon her, and welcome him with smiles? do not all the birds greet him with their merriest notes? do not even the sad tearful clouds deck themselves out in the glowing hues of the rainbow, when he vouchsafes to shine upon them? And shall not man smile with rapture beneath the light of the Sun of Righteousness? Shall he not hail His rising with hymns of praise and psalms of thanksgiving? Shall he not be cheered amid his deepest affliction, when the rays of that Sun fall upon him, and paint the arch of promise on his soul? It cannot be otherwise. Only while we are hemmed in with darkness, are we harassed by terrors and misgivings. When we see clearly on every side, we feel bold and assured: nothing can then daunt, nothing can dismay us. Even that sorrow, which with all others is the most utterly without hope, the sorrow for sin, is to the children of light the pledge of their future bliss. For with them it is the sorrow which worketh

repentance unto salvation: and having the Son of God for their Saviour, what can they fear? Or rather, when they know and feel in their hearts that God has given His Only-begotten Son to suffer death for their sakes, how shall they not trust that He, who has given them His Son, will also give them whatsoever is for their real everlasting good.

Finally, the children of light will also be children of love. Indeed it is only another name for the same thing. For light is the most immediate outward agent and minister of God's love, the most powerful and rapid diffuser of His blessings through the whole universe of His creation. It blesses the earth, and makes her bring forth herbs and plants. It blesses the herbs and plants, and makes them bring forth their grain and their fruit. It blesses every living creature, and enables all to support and to enjoy their existence. Above all it blesses man, in his goings out and his comings in, in his body and in his soul, in his senses and in his imagination and in his affections. In his social intercourse with his brother, and in his solitary communion with his Maker. Merely blot out light from the earth; and joy will pass away from it; and it will sink back into a confused turmoiling chaos. In no way can the children of light so well prove that this is indeed their parentage, as by becoming the instruments of God in shedding His blessings around them. Light illumines everything, the lowly valley as well as the lofty mountain: it fructifies everything, the humblest herb as well as the lordliest tree: and there is nothing hid from its heat. Nor does Christ, the Original, of whom light is the image, make any distinction between the high and the low, between the humble and the lordly. He comes to all, unless they drive Him from their doors. He calls to all, unless they obstinately close their ears against Him. He blesses all, unless they cast away His blessing. Nay, although they cast it away, He still perseveres in blessing them, even unto seven times, even unto seventy times seven. Ye then, who desire to be children of light, ye who would gladly enjoy the full glory and blessedness of that heavenly name, take heed to yourselves, that ye walk as children of light in this respect more especially. No part of your duty is easier: you may find daily and hourly opportunity of practising it. No part of your duty is more delightful: the joy you kindle in the heart of another cannot fail of shedding back its brightness on your own. No part of your duty is more godlike. They who attempted to become like God in knowledge, fell in the garden of Eden. They who strove to become like God in power, were confounded on the plain of Shinar. They who endeavour to become like God in love, will feel His approving smile, and His helping arm: every effort

they make will bring them nearer to His presence: and they will find His renewed image grow more and more vivid within them, until the time comes, when they too shine forth as the Sun in the kingdom of their Father. That such may be our portion, may God in His infinite mercy grant to you who have been listening to my words, and to His servant who has been permitted to utter them before you, for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness: to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end.

Blessed and eternal Word of God, who wast from the beginning with God, who Thyself art God, who madest all things, and without whom nothing ever has been or is or shall be made, O Thou, who art the Light of man, the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world, we render Thee our hearty and fervent thanks, that Thou didst vouchsafe to quit Thy seat at the right hand of the Eternal Omnipotent Glory, and to clothe Thy Divinity with our incarnate humanity, and to raise up our humanity to a communion with Thy Divinity, and to call us, who were sometimes darkness and the children of darkness, to the radiant light of Thy Gospel, that Thou mightest go before us as the Captain of our Salvation, and lead us in triumph to the feet of Thy Almighty Father. Grant, O Lord, that we may never in any way disgrace our calling, that no bribe which this world can hold out may lure us to desert from Thy victorious banner, that no lurking love of darkness may take up its abode in the secret places of our hearts, but that we may be fulfilled and transfigured by the burning love of Thy light. And to this end enable us, who are here assembled, and all Thy Church, who are on this day offering up their prayers to Thee, to cast away all the works of darkness, and to put on the whole armour of light, that we and they may walk in innocence and purity, as becomes the children of light, and so may be found meet to rejoice in Thy birth of the festival of Thy Nativity. These and all other mercies we humbly beg, O blessed Saviour, for the sake of Thy love, for the sake of Thy glory, and for the honour of that sacrifice which Thou hast offered up in our behalf.

Amen.