

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
19:28-37

28. After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst. 29. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar; and they filled a sponge with vinegar and put *it* upon hyssop, and put *it* to his mouth. 30. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished! And he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. 31. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day (for that sabbath day was a high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. 32. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with him. 33. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they did not break his legs. 34. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 35. And he who saw *it* testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. 36. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. 37. And again another Scripture says, They shall look on him whom they pierced.

28.--[*After this.*] When our Lord had commended His mother, Mary, to John, I believe that the miraculous darkness for three hours came on. During those three hours I believe our Lord said nothing except "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" As the darkness was passing away, He said, "I thirst." This, and the two last sayings, "It is finished" and "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," were all that He said during the last three hours. Thus three of His seven sayings on the cross were before the darkness and four after it, or during it.

The order of the famous seven sayings was as follows:

1. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."
2. "Today shall you be with Me in paradise."
3. "Woman, behold your son. Behold your mother."
4. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me."
5. "I thirst."
6. "It is finished."
7. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

[*Jesus knowing...accomplished, etc.*] In order to understand this verse aright, there is one point concerning our Lord's death that must be carefully remembered--His death was entirely a voluntary act on His part. In this one respect His death was unlike that of a common man, and we need not wonder at it when we consider that He was God and man in one Person. The final separation between body and soul, in His case, could not take place until He willed it; and all the power of Jews and Romans together could not have effected it against His will. We die because we cannot help

it; Christ died because He willed to die, and not until the moment arrived when He saw it best. He said Himself, "No man takes life from Me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18). As a matter of fact, we know that our Lord was crucified about nine o'clock in the morning, and that He died about three o'clock in the afternoon of the same day. Mere physical suffering would not account for this. A person crucified in full health was known sometimes to linger on alive for three days! It is evident, therefore, that our Lord willed to give up the ghost in the same day that He was crucified, for some wise reason. This reason, we can easily suppose, was to secure the fullest publicity for His atoning death. He died in broad daylight in the sight of myriads of spectators, and thus the reality of His death could never be denied. This voluntariness and free choice of His death and of the hour of His death, in my judgment, lie at the bottom of the verse before us.

Remembering all this, I believe that the sense of the verse before us must be paraphrased in the following way: "After this Jesus, knowing in His own mind that all things were now practically accomplished that he came into the world to do and that it was expedient that His death should be a most public event, in the face of the crowds assembled to view His crucifixion, proceeded to say the last words that He intended to say before giving up the ghost at three o'clock, and by saying them fulfilled a prophecy of Scripture." Nothing in the details of our Lord's death, we must always remember, was accidental or by chance. Every part of the great sacrifice for sin was foreordained and arranged in the eternal counsels of the Trinity, even to the words that He was to speak on the cross.

The expression "I thirst" was chiefly used, I believe, in order to afford a public testimony of the reality and intensity of His bodily sufferings and to prevent anyone supposing, because of His marvelous calmness and patience, that He was miraculously free from suffering. On the contrary, He would have all around Him know that He felt what all severely wounded persons, and especially what all crucified persons, felt--a burning and consuming thirst. So that when we read that "He suffered for sins," we are to understand that He really and truly suffered.

Henry observes: "The torments of hell are represented by a violent thirst in the complaint of the rich man who begged for a drop of water to cool his tongue. To that everlasting thirst we had all been condemned, if Christ had not suffered on the cross and said 'I thirst.'"

Scott observes that Christ suffered thirst in order that we might drink the water of life forever and thirst no more.

Quesnel remarks: "The tongue of Jesus Christ underwent its own particular torment, in order to atone for the ill-use that men make of their tongues by blasphemy, evil speaking, vanity, lying, gluttony, and drunkenness."

The theory that Christ only said "I thirst" in order to fulfill Scripture is, to my mind, unsatisfactory and unreasonable. His saying "I thirst" was a fulfillment of Scripture, but He did not merely say it in order to fulfill Scripture. St. John, according to his style of writing, only meant

that by His saying "I thirst" and having His thirst relieved by vinegar, the words of Psalm 69:21 were fulfilled.

The Greek word that is rendered "accomplished" is the same that is rendered "finished" in the thirtieth verse. This difference, within two verses, in translating the same word is one of those blemishes in our authorized version which must be regretted.

The connection of the sentence, "that the Scripture might be fulfilled," is not very clear to my mind. Is it to be taken with the words that follow in the verse or with those that immediately precede it? The common view taken, undoubtedly, is to connect the sentence with "I thirst." The sense will then be: "Jesus said 'I thirst,' so that by this the Scripture was fulfilled." But is it necessary to make this connection? Might not the sentence be connected with the one that precedes? The sense will then be: "Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, so that the Scripture was fulfilled concerning Himself said 'I thirst.'" In three other places in St. John where the sentence occurs, "that the Scripture might be fulfilled," the connection is with what goes before and not with what follows. (John 17:12, 19:24-36.) Semler and Tholuck incline to take this view. But I admit that the matter is doubtful, and it certainly is not one of vital importance. One thing only we must remember. Our Lord did not say "I thirst" for no other purpose than to fulfill the Scriptures. He spoke with far deeper and stronger reasons, and yet by His speaking and afterward drinking vinegar, a passage in the prophetic Psalms was fulfilled.

29.--[*Now there was set...of vinegar.*] This would be more literally rendered "there was lying" a vessel. In all probability this was a vessel full of the sour wine in common use among the Roman soldiers.

[*And they filled a sponge, etc.*] The persons here spoken of seem to be the Roman soldiers who carried out the details of the crucifixion. The vinegar was theirs, and it is not likely that anyone would have dared to interfere with the criminal hanging on the cross except the soldiers. The act here recorded must be carefully distinguished from that recorded in Matt. 27:34, and is the same as that recorded in Matt. 27:48. The first drink of vinegar and gall, commonly given to criminals to deaden their pains, our Lord refused. The second here mentioned was given, I believe (notwithstanding what some writers say), in kindness and compassion, and our Lord did not refuse to accept it. A sponge filled with vinegar and put on the end of a stick was far the easiest and most convenient way of giving drink to one whose head was at least seven or eight feet from the ground, and whose hands, being nailed to the cross, were of course unable to take any cup and put it to his mouth. From a sponge full of liquid pressed against the lips, a crucified person might suck some moisture and receive some benefit.

What this "hyssop" here mentioned was is a point by no means clearly ascertained. Casaubon speaks of the question as a proverbial difficulty. Some think that it was a branch of the plant hyssop, fastened to the end of a reed. This seems very improbable because of the "sponge." Dr. Forbes Royle maintains that it was the caper plant, which bears a stick about three or four feet long. Hengstenberg gives evidence from Talmudic writers

that the hyssop was among the branches used at the feast of tabernacles, and that its stalk was an ell long. Like many other questions of Bible natural history, the point must probably be left obscure. Some see deep meaning in the mention of hyssop as the plant used in the ceremonial sprinkling of the law of Moses (see Heb. 9:19). Hyssop, moreover, was used at the passover in sprinkling the door posts with blood (Exod. 12:22). Yet the allusion, to say the least, seems doubtful; nor is it quite clear how any typical meaning can be got out of the mention of the plant in this place.

It is very noteworthy that even in the roughest, hardest kind of men, like these heathen soldiers, there is sometimes a tender and compassionate spot in the breast. According to Matthew's account, the cry "I thirst" must have followed soon after the cry "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me." This exhibition of great mental and bodily agony together, in my opinion, touched the feelings of the soldiers; and one of them at least ran to give our Lord vinegar. We should remember this in dealing with men. Even the worst have often a soft place, if we can find it out, in their inward nature.

Cyril maintains strongly, I must admit, that the act of the soldiers in giving our Lord the sponge full of vinegar was not an act of kindness but of mockery and insult. I cannot, however, agree with him. He does not appear to distinguish between the first drink, which our Lord refused at the beginning of His crucifixion, and the last, which He accepted, but speaks of them as one and the same. Theophylact agrees with Cyril.

30.--[*When Jesus therefore...finished.*] Our Lord having now given plain proof that He had endured intense bodily suffering, and that like any other human sufferer He could appreciate a slight relief of thirst such as the vinegar afforded, proceeded to utter one of His last and most solemn sayings: "It is finished."

This remarkable expression in the Greek is one single word in a perfect tense: "It has been completed." It stands here in majestic simplicity without note or comment from St. John, and we are left entirely to conjecture what the full meaning of it is. For 1800 years Christians have explained it as best they can, and some portion of its meaning in all likelihood has been discovered. Yet it is far from unlikely that such a word spoken on such an occasion by such a person at such a moment just before death, contains depths that no one has ever completely fathomed. Some meanings there are (which no one perhaps will dispute) belonging to this grand expression, which I will briefly mention. No one single meaning, we may be sure, exhausts the whole phrase. It is rich, full, and replete with deep truths.

(a) Our Lord meant that His great work of redemption was finished. He had, as Daniel foretold, "finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness" (Dan. 9:24). After 33 years, since the day when He was born in Bethlehem, He had done all, paid all, performed all, suffered all that was needful to save sinners and satisfy the justice of God. He had fought the battle and won it, and in two days would give proof of it by rising again.

(b) Our Lord meant that God's determinate counsel and fore-will concerning His death was now accomplished and finished. All that had been appointed from all eternity that He should suffer, He had now suffered.

(c) Our Lord meant that He had finished the work of keeping God's holy law. He had kept it to the uttermost as our head and representative, and Satan had found nothing in Him. He had magnified the law and made it honorable by doing perfectly all its requirements. "Woe unto us," says Burkitt, "if Christ had left but one farthing of our debt unpaid. We must have lain in hell insolvent to all eternity."

(d) Our Lord meant that He had finished the types and figures of the ceremonial law. He had at length offered up the perfect sacrifice, of which every Mosaic sacrifice was a type and symbol, and there remained no more need of offerings for sin. The old covenant was finished.

(e) Our Lord meant that He had finished and fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. At length, as the Seed of the woman, he had bruised the serpent's head and accomplished the work which Messiah was engaged by covenant to come and perform.

(f) Finally, our Lord meant that His sufferings were finished. Like His Apostle, He had "finished His course." His long life of pain and contradiction from sinners, and above all His intense sufferings as bearer of our sins on Gethsemane and Calvary, were at last at an end. The storm was over, and the worst was passed. The cup of suffering was at last drained to the very dregs.

Thoughts such as these come to my own mind when I read the solemn phrase "It is finished." But I am far from saying that the phrase does not contain a great deal more. In interpreting such a saying, I am deeply conscious that there is an inexhaustible fullness in our Lord's words. I am sure we are more likely to make too little of them than to make too much.

Luther remarks: "In this word, 'It is finished,' will I comfort myself. I am forced to confess that all *my* finishing of the will of God is imperfect, piecemeal work, while yet the law urges on me that not so much as one tittle of it must remain unaccomplished. Christ is the end of the law. What it requires, Christ has performed."

To the objection of some persons, that all things were not completely finished and accomplished until Jesus rose again and ascended into heaven, Calvin replies that Jesus knew that all things were now *practically* accomplished, and that nothing now remained to hinder His finishing the work He came to do.

[*And He bowed His head.*] This is the action of one dying. When the will ceases to exercise power over muscles and nerves, at once those parts of the body that are not rigid, like the bones, collapse and fall in any direction to which their center of gravity inclines them. The head of a crucified person would naturally in death droop forward on the breast, the

neck being no longer kept stiff by the will. This is what seems to have happened in the case of our Lord.

May we not gather from this expression that our Lord, up to this moment, held up His head erect, firm, steady, and unmoved even under extreme pain?

Alford remarks how this little incident was evidently recorded by an eyewitness. The miraculous darkness must have now passed away in order to let this movement of the head be seen.

[*And gave up the ghost.*] These words literally mean "delivered up the spirit." It is an expression never used of any dying person in the Bible except our Lord. It is an expression denoting voluntary action. He delivered up His spirit of His own free will, because the hour was come when He chose to do it. He had just said, after using the phrase "It is finished," "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," and then He proceeded to deliver up His spirit into the hands of God the Father. It is the Father and none else to whom the words "He delivered up" must apply.

Augustine observes: "Not against His will did the Savior's spirit leave His flesh, but because He would, and when He would, and how He would. Who is there that can even go to sleep when He will as Jesus died when He would? Who thus puts off his clothes when he will as Jesus unclothed Himself of His flesh when He would? Who goes thus out of his door when he will as Jesus, when He would, went out of this world?"

In death as well as in life, our Lord has left us an example. Of course we cannot, like Him, choose the moment of our death; and in this, as in everything else, we must be content to follow Him at an enormous distance. The best of saints is a miserable copy of his Master. Nevertheless, we too, as Cyril observes, must endeavor to put our souls into God's hands, if God is really our Father, when the last hour of our lives comes; and like Jesus, to place them by faith in our Father's keeping and trust our Father to take care of them.

Above all, let us never forget, as we read of Christ's death, that He died for our sins as our Substitute. His death is our life. He died that we might live. We who believe in Christ shall live forevermore, sinners as we are, because Christ died for us, the innocent for the guilty. Satan cannot drag us away to everlasting death in hell. The second death cannot harm us. We may safely say, "Who can condemn me, or slay my soul? I know well that I deserve death and that I ought to die because of my sins. But then my blessed Head and Substitute died for me, and when He died, I, His poor weak member, was reckoned to die also. Get behind me Satan, for Christ was crucified and died. My debt is paid, and you cannot demand it twice over." Forever let us bless God that Christ "gave up the ghost" and really died upon the cross before myriads of witnesses. That giving up the ghost was the hinge on which all our salvation turned. In vain Christ's life and miracles and preaching would have been, if Christ had not at last died for us! We needed not merely a teacher, but an atonement and the death of a Substitute. The mightiest transaction that ever took place on earth since the fall of man was accomplished when Jesus gave up the ghost. The careless crowd around the cross saw nothing but the common death of a

common criminal. But in the eyes of God the Father, the promised payment for a world's sin was at last effected and the kingdom of heaven was thrown wide open to all believers. The finest pictures of the crucifixion that artists have ever painted give a miserably insufficient idea of what took place when Jesus gave up the ghost. They can show a suffering man on a cross, but they cannot convey the least notion of what was really going on--the satisfaction of God's broken law, the payment of sinners' debt to God, and the complete atonement for a world's sin.

The precise physical cause of the death of Christ is a very interesting subject, which must be reverently approached, but deserves attention. Dr. Stroud, in his book on the subject, takes a view which is supported by the opinions of three eminent Edinburgh physicians--the late Sir James Simpson, Dr. Begbie, and Dr. Struthers. This view is that the immediate cause of our Lord's decease was rupture of the heart. Dr. Simpson argues that all the circumstances of our Lord's death--His crying with a loud voice just before death, not like an exhausted person, and His sudden giving up the ghost--confirm this view very strongly. He also says that "strong mental emotions produce sometimes laceration or rupture of the walls of the heart;" and he adds, "If ever a human heart was riven and ruptured by the mere amount of mental agony endured, it would surely be that of our Redeemer." Above all, he argues that the rupture of the heart would go far to account for the flow of blood and water from our Lord's die when pierced with a spear. Dr. Simpson's very interesting letter on the subject will be found in the appendix to "Hanna's Last Days of our Lord's Passion."

Concerning the deep question as to what became of our Lord's soul when He gave up the ghost, it must suffice to believe that His soul went to paradise, the place of the departed spirits of believers. He said to the penitent thief, "Today you shall be *with Me* in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). This is the true meaning of the article "descended into hell" in the Belief. "Hell" in that clause certainly does not mean the place of punishment, but the separate state or place of departed spirits.

Some theologians hold that between His death and resurrection, "He went and preached to the spirits in prison" (1 Pet. 3:19) and proclaimed the accomplishment of His work of atonement. This, to say the least, is doubtful. But Athanasius, Ambrose, Zwingle, Calvin, Erasmus, Calovius, and Alford hold this view.

Concerning the miraculous signs that accompanied our Lord's death--the darkness from twelve o'clock to three, the earthquake, the tearing of the temple veil--St. John is silent, and doubtless for some wise reasons. But we may well believe that they struck myriads with awe and astonishment, and perhaps smoothed the way for our Lord's burial in Joseph's tomb without opposition or objection.

31.--[*The Jews therefore, because it was, etc.*] The "Jews" in this verse, as in many other places in St. John's Gospel, can only mean the chief priests and leaders of the nation at Jerusalem; the same men who had pressed on Pilate our Lord's crucifixion--Annas, Caiaphas, and their companions.

The "preparation" means the day preceding the passover sabbath. That sabbath being pre-eminently a "high day," or, to render the Greek literally, a "great" day in the year, the Friday or day preceding it, was devoted to special preparations. Hence the day went by the name of "the preparation of the sabbath." The expression makes it certain that Jesus was crucified on a Friday. The Jews saw clearly that unless they took active measures to prevent it, the body of our Lord would remain all night hanging on the tree of the cross, the law would be broken (Deut. 21:23), and a dead body would hang throughout the sabbath in full view of the temple and close by the city walls. Therefore they made haste to have Him taken down from the cross and buried.

The breaking of the legs of crucified criminals, in order to dispatch them, seems to have been a common accompaniment of this barbarous mode of execution when it was necessary to make an end of them and get them out of the way. In asking Pilate to allow this breaking of the legs, they did nothing but what was usual. But for anything we can see, the thing would not have been done if the Jews had not asked. The verse supplies a wonderful example of the way in which God can make the wickedest men unconsciously carry out His purposes and promote His glory. If the Jews had not interfered this Friday afternoon, for anything we can see, Pilate would have allowed our Lord's body to hang upon the cross till Sunday or Monday, and perhaps to see corruption. The Jews procured our Lord's burial the very day that He died and thus secured the fulfillment of His famous prophecy, "Destroy this temple of my body, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). If He had not been buried till Sunday or Monday, He could not have risen again the third day after His death. As it was, the Jews managed things so that our Lord was laid in the grave before the evening of Friday and was thus enabled to fulfill the famous type of Jonah, and give the sign He had promised to give of His Messiahship by lying three days in the earth and then rising again the third day after He died. All this could not have happened if the Jews had not interfered and got Him taken from the cross and buried on Friday afternoon! How true it is that the wickedest enemies of God are only axes and saws and hammers in His hands, and are ignorantly His instruments for doing His work in the world. The restless, busy, meddling of Caiaphas and his companions was actually one of the causes that Christ rose the third day after death, and His Messiahship was proved. Pilate was their tool, but they were God's tools! The Romans, in all probability, would have left our Lord's body hanging on the cross till sun and rain had putrefied and consumed it, had such a thing been possible. Bishop Pearson says it was a common rule of Roman law not to permit sepulture to the body of a crucified person. The burial, therefore, was entirely owing to the request of the Jews. The providence of God ordered things so that they who interceded for His crucifixion interceded for His burial. And by so doing they actually paved the way for the crowning miracle of His resurrection!

Let us mark the miserable scrupulosity that is sometimes compatible with the utmost deadness of conscience. Thus we see men making ado about a dead body remaining on the cross on the Sabbath at the very time when they had just murdered an innocent living person with the most flagrant injustice and monstrous cruelty. It is a specimen of "straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel."

32.--[*Then the soldiers came, etc.*] Pilate having given his consent to the request of the Jews, the Roman soldiers proceeded to break the legs of the criminals and began with the two thieves. Why they began with them is by no means clear. If the three crosses were all in a row, it is hard to see why the two outer criminals of the three should have their legs broken first and the one in the center be left to the last. We must suppose one of three things in order to explain this.

(a) Possibly two of the soldiers broke the legs of one malefactor, and the other two soldiers the legs of the other. Reason and common sense point out that it does not require four men to do this horrid work on a helpless, unresisting, crucified person. Thus having finished their work at the two outward crosses, they would come last to the center one.

(b) Possibly the two outward crosses may have been rather forwarder in position than the central one so that the sufferers might see each others' faces. In that case the soldiers would naturally begin with the crosses they came to first. This, perhaps, would account for the penitent thief having read the word "King" over our Lord's head on the cross.

(c) Possibly the soldiers saw that our Lord was dead even before they came up to Him. At any rate, they probably saw that He was still and motionless, and thus suspecting that He was dead they did not trouble themselves with His body but began with the two who evidently were yet alive.

It is noteworthy that the penitent thief, even after his conversion, had more suffering to go through before he entered paradise. The grace of God and the pardon of sin did not deliver him from the agony of having his legs broken. When Christ undertakes to save our souls, He does not undertake to deliver us from bodily pains and a conflict with the last enemy. Penitents as well as impenitents must taste death and all its accompaniments. Conversion is not heaven, though it leads to it.

Scott remarks that those who broke the legs of the penitent thief and hastened his end were unconscious instruments of fulfilling our Lord's promise, "*Today you shall be with me in Paradise.*"

How the legs of crucified criminals were broken we do not know; but it was probably done in the roughest manner. With such tools at hand as the hammers used for driving in the nails and the mattocks and spades used for putting the cross in the ground, the soldiers could hardly lack instruments. It must be remembered that a simple fracture would not cause death. The Greek word which we render "break" literally means "shiver to pieces." May it not be feared that this is the true meaning here?

33.--[*But when they came to Jesus, etc.*] This verse contains the first proof of the mighty fact that our Lord really died. We are told that the soldiers did not break His legs, because they "saw that He was dead already." Accustomed as Roman soldiers necessarily were to see death in every form, wounds of every kind, and dead bodies of every description, and trained to take away human life by their profession, they were of all men

least likely to make a mistake about such a matter. Thus we have it most expressly recorded that the soldiers "saw that He was dead already" and therefore did not break His legs. Our salvation hinges so entirely on Jesus Christ's vicarious death that a moment's reflection will show us the divine wisdom of the fact being thoroughly proved. His unbelieving enemies could never say that He did not really die but was only in a swoon or fainting-fit or state of insensibility. The Roman soldiers are witnesses that on the center cross of the tree they saw a dead man.

34.--[*But one...pierced...spear.*] Here we have the second proof that our Lord did really die. One of the soldiers, determined to make sure work and leave nothing uncertain, thrust his spear into our Lord's side, in all *probability* directing his thrust at the heart as the seat of vitality. That thrust made it certain, if there had been any doubt before, that the body on the central cross was actually dead. They believed it from appearance, and perhaps from touch, when they first came up to the cross. They made it quite certain by the thrust of the spear. The body of a person in a swoon would have given some sign of life when pierced with a spear.

The gross inaccuracy of those pictures that represent this soldier as a horseman is worth noticing. Our Lord's body was easily within reach of the thrust of a spear in the hand of a foot soldier. There is no evidence whatever that any Roman cavalry were near the cross!

The theory of Bishop Pearson that this soldier pierced our Lord's side in anger and impatience, as if provoked to find Him dead, does not appear to me well-founded. It is not likely that the soldiers would be angry at finding a state of things which saved them trouble. To me it seems far more likely that the thrust was the hasty, careless act of a rough soldier accustomed to prove in this way whether a body was alive or dead. I have heard it said by an eyewitness that some of the Cossacks who followed our retreating cavalry after the famous Balaclava charge in the Crimean war, were seen to prick the bodies of fallen soldiers with their spears in order to see whether they were dead or alive.

Theophylact suggests that this soldier thrust the spear into our Lord's side in order to gratify the wicked Jews who stood by.

Besser remarks most sensibly: "Even the soldier's spear was guided by the Father's hand."

[*And...blood and water came out.*] The remarkable fact here recorded has given rise to considerable difference of opinion.

(a) Some, as Grotius, Calvin, Beza, and others, hold that this issue of blood and water was a proof that the heart or pericardium was pierced, and death in consequence quite certain. They say that the same result would follow from a thrust into the side of any person lately dead, and that blood and water, or something closely resembling it, would immediately flow out. They maintain, therefore, that there was nothing supernatural in the circumstance recorded.

(b) Others, as most of the Fathers, Brentius, Musculus, Calovius, Lampe, Lightfoot, Rollock, Jansenius, Bengel, Horsley, and Hengstenberg, hold that this issue of blood and water was supernatural, extraordinary, unusual, and contrary to all experience; and they maintain that it was a special miracle.

The question is one of those that will probably never be settled. We are not in possession of sufficiently precise information to justify a very positive opinion. We do not know for a certainty that the left side of our Lord was pierced and not the right. We do not know exactly how much blood and water flowed out, whether a large quantity or a very little. That a miracle might take place at such a death, on such an occasion, and in the body of such a Person, we have no right to deny. The mere facts that when our Lord hung on the cross the sun was darkened, and when He gave up the ghost the veil of the temple was rent in two and the rocks rent and the earth quaked, might well prepare our minds to see nothing extraordinary in a miracle taking place, and almost to expect it. Perhaps the safest line to adopt is to combine both views. The thrust of the spear into the side caused blood to flow and proved that the seat of vitality in the body was pierced. The extraordinary and unusual flow of blood and water was a supernatural event and meant to teach spiritual lessons.

I may be allowed to say that three eminent medical men in large practice, whom I have ventured to consult on this verse, are all of one mind--that any large flow of blood and water from a dead body is contrary to all ordinary experience. Each of them, singularly enough, has expressed this opinion independently and without any communication with the other two.

Concerning the symbolical meaning of this flow of blood and water from our Lord's side, much has been written in every age of the Church. That it had a deep spiritual sense appears almost certain from St. John's words in his first Epistle (1 John 5:6-8). But what the real symbolical meaning was is a very disputable question.

(a) The common opinion is that the blood and water symbolized the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, both given by Christ and emanating from Him, and both symbols of atonement, cleansing, and forgiveness. This is the view of Chrysostom, Augustine, Andrews, and a large body of divines both ancient and modern. I cannot myself receive this opinion. In matters like this I dare not call any man master, or endorse an interpretation of Scripture when I do not feel convinced that it is true. I cannot see the necessity of dragging in the sacraments at every point in the exposition of God's Word, as some do.

(b) My own opinion is most decided that the flow of blood and water, whether supernatural or not, was meant to be a symbolical fulfillment of the famous prophecy in Zechariah: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). It was a practical declaration, by fact and deed, to all Jews that by Christ's death that famous prophecy was fulfilled, and that now at last there was a fountain opened by Christ's death. The moment He was dead this fountain was opened and began to flow. Over the bleeding side of our Lord there might have been written, "Behold

the fountain for all sin." It is no small evidence to my mind, in favor of this view, that this famous prophecy occurs only five verses after the text immediately quoted by St. John in this very chapter, "they shall look on Him whom they pierced" (Zech. 12:10.)

Augustine sees a type of this wound in our Lord's side, from which flowed blood and water, in the door in the side of Noah's ark, by which the living creatures entered in and were preserved from drowning! He also sees another type of the transaction in the first Adam sleeping and Eve being formed out of his side.

The opinion held by some, that this "blood and water" warrant the mixture of water and wine in the Lord's Supper, seems to be utterly untenable. As Musculus sensibly observes, it was not "wine and water" but "blood and water" that flowed from our Lord's side. There is not the slightest evidence that our Lord used water at the institution of the Lord's Supper.

That blood was the symbol of atonement and water of cleansing, every careful reader of the Old Testament must know. The two things are brought together by St. Paul in Heb. 9:19. The smiting of the rock by Moses, and water flowing forth, was also typical of the event before us. Lightfoot mentions a Jewish tradition that blood and water flowed from the rock at first.

Henry says: "The blood and water signified the two great benefits that all believers partake of through Christ--justification and sanctification. Blood stands for remission, water for regeneration; blood for atonement, water for purification. The two must always go together. Christ has joined them together, and we must not think to put them apart. They both flowed from the pierced side of our Redeemer."

35.--[*And he who saw it testified, etc.*] This singular verse, by common consent, can only refer to St. John. It is as though he said, "The fact to which I now testify I saw with my own eyes, and my testimony is true, accurate, and trustworthy; and I know that I say true things in recording the fact so that you to whom I write need not hesitate to believe me. I stood by. I saw it. I was an eyewitness, and I do not write by hearsay."

The Greek word rendered "true" in the second place in this verse means literally "true things."

The question arises naturally, 'To what does John refer in this peculiar verse?' (a) Does he refer only to the issue of blood and water from our Lord's side as a singularly miraculous event? (b) Or does he refer to the thrust of the spear into our Lord's side as a convincing proof that our Lord really died? (c) Or does he refer to the fact that our Lord's legs were not broken, and that he thus saw the great type of the passover lamb fulfilled?

I decidedly lean to the opinion that the verse refers to all three things I have mentioned together and not to any one of them only. All three things were so remarkable and so calculated to strike the mind of a pious and intelligent Jew, and all happened in such close and rapid succession, that

John emphatically records that he saw all three with his own eyes. He seems to say, "I myself saw that not a bone of the Lamb of God was broken, so that He fulfilled the type of the passover. I myself saw a spear thrust into His heart, so that He was a true Sacrifice and really died. And I myself saw that blood and water came out of His side, and I beheld a fulfillment of the old prophecy of a fountain for sin being opened." When we consider the immense importance and significance of all these three things, we do not wonder that John should have been inspired to write this verse in which he emphatically tells his readers that he is writing down nothing but the plain naked truth, and that he actually saw these three things--the unbroken legs, the pierced side, the flow of blood and water--with his own eyes.

Pearce and Alford think that the expression "that ye might believe" signifies "that ye might believe that Jesus did really die on the cross." Others decidedly prefer thinking that it means "that ye may believe that blood and water did really flow from the side of Jesus after His death." Others take the phrase in a general sense, "that ye may believe more firmly than ever on Christ as the true sacrifice for sin."

36,37.--[*For these things were done, etc.*] In these two verses John explains distinctly to his readers why two of the facts he has just mentioned, however trifling they might seem to an ignorant person, were in reality of great importance. By one of these facts--the not breaking a bone of our Lord's body--the text was fulfilled which said that not a bone of the passover lamb should be broken (Ex. 12:46). By the other fact--the piercing of our Lord's side--the prophecy of Zechariah was fulfilled, that the inhabitants of Jerusalem "should look on him whom they pierced" (Zech. 12:12).

Alford observes that the expression "they shall look" does not refer to the Roman soldiers but to the repentant in the world, who at the time this Gospel was written had begun to fulfill this prophecy; and that it also contains a prophetic reference to the future conversion of Israel, who were here the real piercers, though the act was done by the hands of others."

It is almost needless to say that the passage, like many others, does not mean that these things were done in order that Scripture might be fulfilled, but that by these things being done the Scripture was fulfilled, and God's perfect foreknowledge about the least details of Christ's death was proved. Nothing in the great sacrifice happened by chance, luck, or accident. All was arranged as appointed, from first to last, many centuries before by the determinate counsel of God. Caiaphas, Pilate, and the Roman soldiers were all unconscious instruments in carrying into effect what God had long predicted and foretold to the least jot and tittle.

Let us carefully note here what strong evidence these verses supply in favor of a literal, and not a merely spiritual, fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

Rollock observes: "If God has ordained and said anything, it lies not in the hands of any man to disannul it. If God shall say, "There shall not be one bone of my anointed broken," great Cæsar and all the kings of the

earth, the King of Spain and the Pope, and all their adherents shall not be able to do the contrary. So, in the midst of all fear and danger, let us depend on the providence of God.