ADVENT SERMONS, CONSISTING OF FOUR ON THE STATE OF THE BLESSED DEAD, AND FOUR ON THE COMING OF THE BRIDEGROOM. PREACHED IN CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL, 1868 AND 1869

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HENRY ALFORD

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The State of the Blessed Dead,

AND FOUR ON

The Coming of the Bridegroom.

Preached in Canterbury Cathedral, 1868 and 1869,

BY THE LATE

HENRY ALFORD, D.D.,

DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

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MDCCCLXXII.

The State of the Blessed Dead.

I.

I HAVE already announced that during this Advent season I would call your attention to the state of the blessed dead. My object in so doing is simply that we may recall to ourselves that which Scripture has revealed respecting them, for our edification, and for our personal comfort. And I would guard that which will be said by one or two preliminary observations.

With Death as an object of terror, with

Death from the mere moralist's point of view, as the termination of human schemes and hopes, we Christians have nothing to do. We are believers in and servants of One who has in these senses abolished Death. Our schemes and hopes are not terminated by Death, but reach onward into a state beyond it.

Again, with that state beyond, except as one of blessedness purchased for us by the Son of God, I am not at present dealing. It is of those that die in the Lord alone that I speak.

And this being so, it is clear that the first point about them demanding our attention is, the very commencement of their state at the moment of death. And this will form our subject to-day.

We shall be guided in its consideration by two texts of Holy Scripture. The one is that where our Lord answers the prayer of the dying thief that He would remember him when He came into His kingdom, Luke xxiii. 43: "VERILY I SAY UNTO THEE, TO-DAY SHALT THOU BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."

And the other is an expression of St. Paul, Phil. i. 23, not improbably taken from those very words recorded in the gospel of that evangelist who was his companion in travel—"TO DEPART AND TO BE WITH CHRIST."

Now in both these one fact is simply declared, viz.: that the departed spirit of the faithful man is WITH CHRIST. It is as if one bright light were lifted for us in the midst of a realm brooded over by impenetrable

mist. For who knows whither the departed spirit has betaken itself when it has left us here? One of the most painful pangs in bereavement by death is the utter and absolute severance without a spark of intelligence of the departed. One hour, life is blest by their presence: the next, it is entirely and for ever gone from us, never to be heard of more. One word, one utterance—how precious in that moment of anguish do we feel that it would be! But we are certain it never will be granted us. None has ever come back who has told the story. Where the spirit wakes and finds itself,—this none has ever declared to us; nor shall we know until our own turn comes. Now in such a state of uncertainty, these texts speak for us a certain truth: The departed spirit is WITH CHRIST.

I shall regard this revelation negatively and positively: as to what it disproves, and as to what it implies.

First, then, it disproves the idea of the spirit passing at death into a state of unconsciousness, from which it is to wake only at the great day of the resurrection. If it is to be with Christ, this cannot be. Christ is in no such state of unconsciousness; He has entered into His rest, and is waiting till all things shall be put under His feet; and it would be a mere delusion to say of the blessed dead that they shall be with Christ, if they were to be virtually annihilated during this time that Christ is waiting for His kingdom. Besides, how then would the Lord's promise to the thief be fulfilled? What consolation would it have been to him, what