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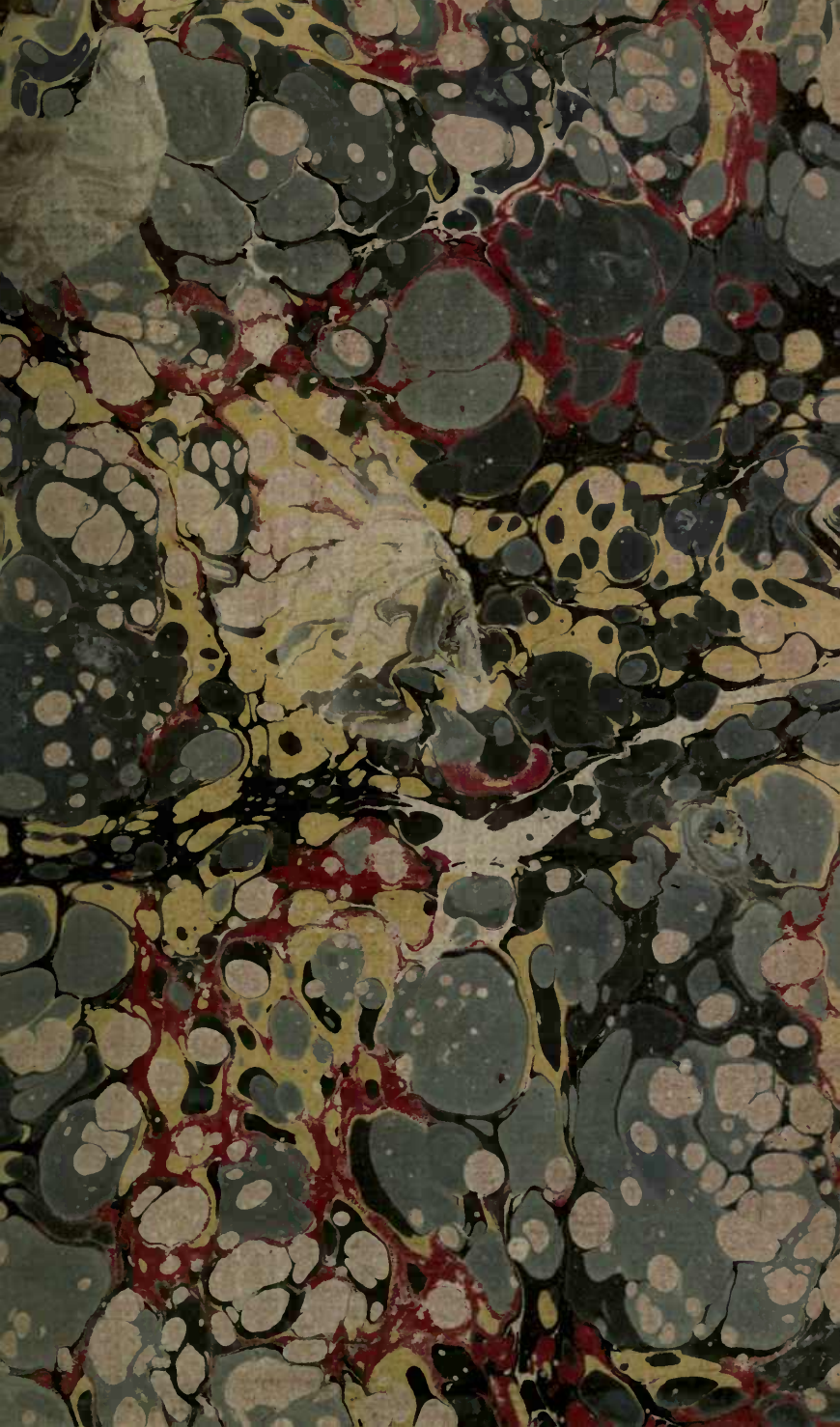


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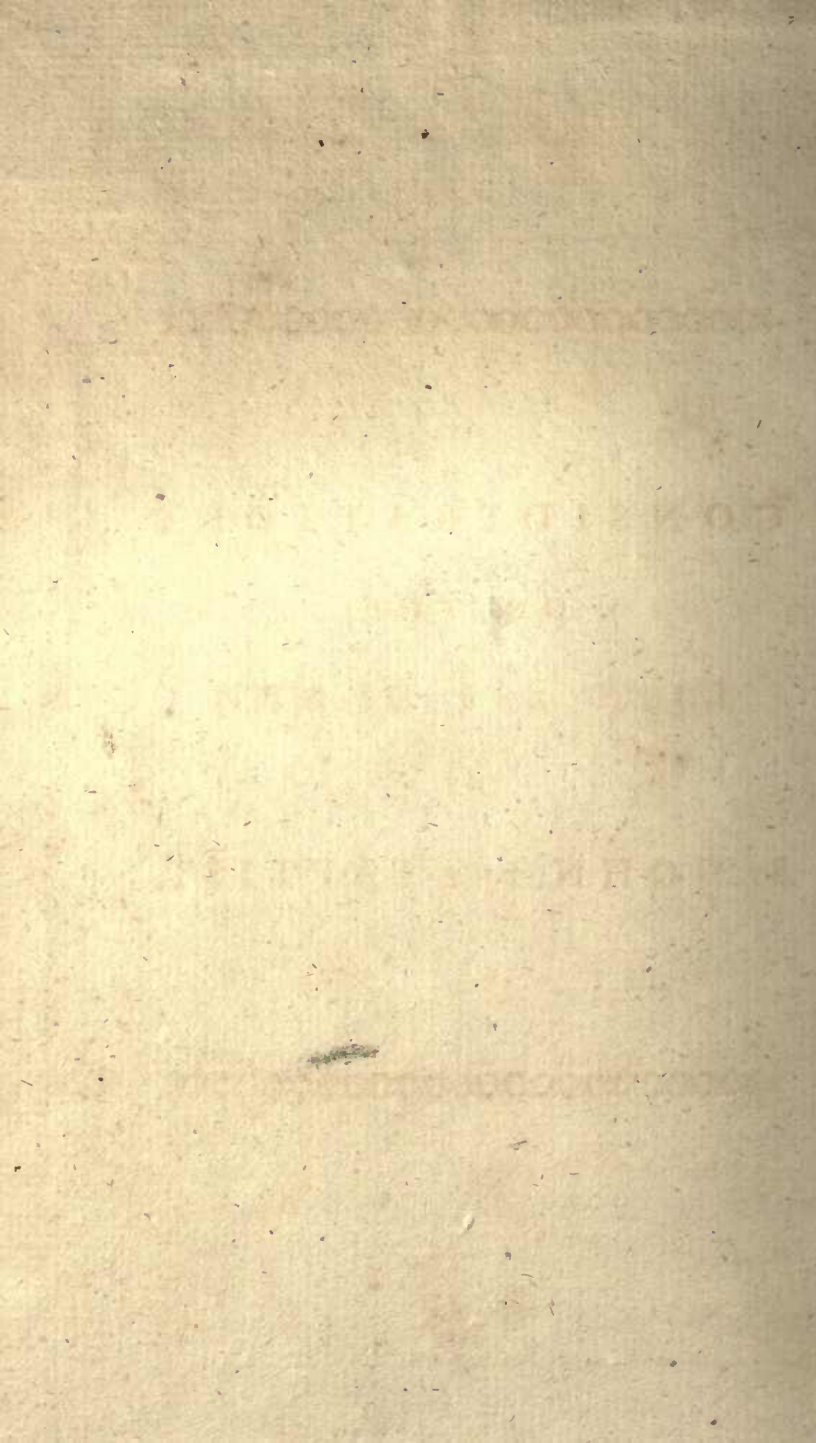
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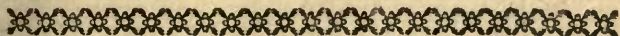
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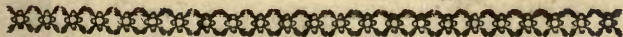
CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

LIFE AND DEATH

OF

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.



CONSIDERATIONS

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OF

ST. JOHN the BAPTIST.

BY GEORGE HORNE, D.D.
PRESIDENT OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE
IN OXFORD.

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LIFE AND DEATH

OF

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Jan. 5. 1769.

BY GEORGE HORNE, D.D.

PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS

IN OXFORD.

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P R E F A C E.

IT is a fine remark of Lord *Bacon*, that, “As wines, which, at first
“ pressing, run gently, yield a more
“ pleasant taste than those, where the
“ wine-press is hard wrought, because
“ those somewhat relish of the stone
“ and skin of the grape; so those ob-
“ servations are most wholesome and
“ sweet, which flow from Scriptures
“ gently expressed, and naturally ex-
“ pounded, and are not wrested or
“ drawn aside to common places, or
“ controversies.”

OBSERVATIONS of this kind may certainly be made, to great advantage, on *historical* portions of Scripture more especially; since, as the same incomparable author tells us elsewhere, “ Knowledge drawn freshly, and as it were in our view, out of particulars, knows the way best to particulars again: and it hath much greater life for practice, when the discourse attends upon the example, than when the example attends upon the discourse; as *Machiavel* handled matters of policy and government, by discourses of history and example taken from *Livy*.” The doctrines and duties of Christianity are, in like manner, best deduced from the facts on which it is founded. The narration furnisheth both matter and method for the discourse, which is heard with pleasure, and remembered with ease.

HISTORY

HISTORY and biography are frequently employed in the service of error and vice. They may operate as effectually in the recommendation of truth and virtue. Example shews truth as it were embodied ; and while it displays the excellency of virtue, demonstrates its practicability. The contemplation of faith, as it discovereth itself in the lives of patriarchs and prophets, apostles and saints, inclineth us to believe as they did ; and the sight of frail mortals, like ourselves, who, by the divine assistance, surmounted all obstructions, and continued to walk in the paths of righteousness, naturally suggesteth, to every beholder, the question — What should hinder me from doing the same ?

OPPORTUNITIES for such exercises are continually afforded by the return of those days, whereon we commemo-

rate, the heroic piety of ancient worthies, distinguished in the annals of religion ; whose story presenteth us with occurrences, not, like those related in secular histories, of use only to politicians and generals, but universally interesting ; instructing us in the art of governing the little kingdom within ; of atchieving the greatest conquests, and gaining the most glorious victories ; since “ Better is he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city ;” teaching us how to live the life, and die the death of the righteous ; a twofold task, which every man hath upon his hands, and in the performance of which he cannot fail, but at the hazard of something more valuable than crowns and sceptres.

THE author of the following *Considerations* was directed, in the choice
of

of his subject, by the circumstances of his situation, some parts of them having been delivered from the pulpit, as occasion called for them, in the chapel of *St. Mary Magdalen* College, upon the anniversary of the nativity of *St. John* the Baptist, before a learned and most respectable audience. The favourable manner, in which they were then heard, hath encouraged him to revise, enlarge, and digest them into their present form. The reader hath now before him a compleat history of the Baptist, extracted from the Evangelists, and methodized according to the order of time, in which the events appear to have happened, with such observations and reflections as the several parts of it seemed to suggest, for the confirmation of faith, and the advancement of holiness.

M O O

AN attentive perusal of the subsequent pages may, it is hoped, be of service to the younger students in theology, with a view to whom, and to those more particularly of the Society, whose welfare and prosperity the author is bound by every tie to consult and promote, as they were at first composed, so they are now published; that, beholding the glories which display themselves in the exalted character here offered to their inspection, they may be fired with a noble ambition to bear their testimony to the best of masters, and, from a well spent retirement, come forth bright examples of temperance and purity, zeal and knowledge, integrity and constancy, to preach Repentance, and proclaim Salvation.

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CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE


LIFE AND DEATH

OF

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

SECTION I.

*Considerations on the nativity of St. John,
and the circumstances that attended it.*

THE lights of the intellectual, SECT. I.
like those of the natural system, 
are not all of equal magnitude
and lustre. In the church, as in the
firmament, "one star differeth from

A

"ano-

SECT. I.

“another star in glory.” Each contributeth it’s share towards dissipating the darkness with which we are surrounded; but some, by their superior splendor, immediately attract and dazzle the eye of the beholder. Conspicuous, above others, is the character of St. *John* the Baptist, that bright precursor of the sun, and harbinger of the morning, who arose to give notice of Messiah’s approach, and to prepare the world for his reception: burning, and shining, he ran his course, proclaiming to the inhabitants of the earth, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;” in other words, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand; cast off therefore the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light^a. Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light^b.”

PRAISE is ever valuable in proportion to the judgment and integrity of him who bestoweth it; and the panegyric is truly honourable, when the panegyrist is one who will not flatter, and

^a Rom. xiii. 12.

^b Ephef. v. 14.

who cannot be deceived. How then shall we raise our thoughts to conceive adequately of a person, whose encomium was spoken by the Son of God, and concerning whom that Son of God declared, “Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist^a.” After this declaration made by the master, the disciples cannot well be hyperbolic in their praises of St. *John*, as the great pattern of repentance; the relation of Christ; the friend of the bridegroom; the herald of the king immortal; the glory of saints, and the joy of the world.

It is observable, that the Baptist’s nativity is the only one (that of Christ excepted) which the church has thought proper to celebrate. The days appointed for the commemoration of other saints are generally those on which they respectively ceased from their labours, and entered into their everlasting rest; the day of a good man’s death being indeed the day of his birth, and this world no more than the womb in which he is formed and matured for his admission

^a Matt. xi. 11.

SECT. I.

into a better, where there is neither crying nor pain. But the nativity of St. *John* being designed, by the remarkable incidents that accompanied it, to turn the eyes of men towards one who was far greater; one, the latchet of whose shoes he confessed himself not worthy to unloose; the church keeps a day sacred to it, and directs us to begin our meditations by considering, as all *Judea* did when it happened, "what manner of child" that should be, which was so wonderfully born.

HE whose works are all wrought in number, weight, and measure, bringeth every event to pass in it's proper season. The time approached which had been decreed in the counsels of the Most High, foretold by the Prophets, and ardently desired by holy men of old, when the Son of God should be manifested, to redeem his people from death, and to lead them in the path of life. As this redemption was not to be effected by fleshly might and power, the spiritual king of *Israel* chose to make his appearance, when the house of *Da-*

* Luke i. 66.

vid was like a root buried in the earth; SECT. I.
and therefore his forerunner was born
“in the days of *Herod* the king^a ;”
days, when his countrymen were under
a foreign jurisdiction, and the prospect
on all sides was gloomy. True indeed
it is, that the sacred lamp went not out
in the temple, where the good old *Si-*
meon and the devout *Anna* served God
instantly with fastings and prayers, and
waited, as many others did, with ear-
nest expectation, for the consolation of
Israel. They were not discouraged by
the gross darkness which then covered
the earth, but rather concluded from
thence, that the dawn of day could not
be far off; as the mercies of heaven
generally come when man most wants,
and, humanly speaking, has least ground
to hope for them; to the end that he
may with thankfulness receive the be-
nefit, and with humility give God the
glory. And this may be an useful lesson
to those who shall live in the latter days
of the Gentile church, which are to
precede the *second* advent of Christ,
when they will behold the religion of

^a Luke i. 5.

SECT. I. Christians degenerated into an empty form, and their zeal and love frozen at the fountain; when daily multiplying heresies, like the frogs in *Egypt*, shall infest and contaminate all things; when infidelity shall rage and swell, and iniquity of every kind shall abound. Sights like these may confound and stagger those who shall then be ignorant of the scriptures, and weak in faith. But an acquaintance with the divine dispensations will turn them into so many arguments for the truth of revelation, and the approach of the day of God. “When these things begin to come to pass; then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh^a :” then be found, with *Simeon* and *Anna*, in the temple, waiting for the consolation of *Israel*.

28 WHEN we read of men who have done good in their generations, and shone as lights in the world, curiosity naturally leads us to enquire after their connections and relations; and especially after the happy persons chosen to be the instruments of conveying such blessings

^a Luke xxi. 28.

to the church. The scripture account of *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* is concise, but comprehensive. He was “a priest of the course of *Abia*,” she was “of the daughters of *Aaron*,” and “they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless^a. The course of *Abia* was the eighth in order of the twenty four courses of priests appointed to relieve each other in the service of the temple, where, during their ministration, they resided in the chambers allotted them for that purpose; that so, being sequestered from the cares and pollutions of the world, they might “wait on the Lord without distraction,” performing the outward ceremonies of the law, and exercising their faith in the contemplation of those heavenly things shadowed out by them. This holy office *Zacharias*, in the worst of times, adorned and beautified with a correspondent holiness of life. The spirit of the sanctuary rested upon him, and manifested itself in the fruit of righteousness; *na*

^a Luke i. 5, 6.

righteous-

SECT. I. righteousness, which exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees, approving itself in the sight of God, to whom are known the secrets of the heart, as well as in that of men, who are witnesses only of the external deportment. Thro' the strength of this spirit, he walked in the path of an uniform obedience, an invariable observer of those ordinances which were at that time the sacramental means and pledges of pardon and acceptance, through faith in him, of whose advent he was a devout expectant. From such a father, and a mother worthy of him, who graced the line of *Aaron* by a like inviolable sanctity of manners, was the Baptist to descend; that the *Jews* might have no possible objection against him; that he might be a proper forerunner of one who was to make all the world in love with the beauty of holiness; that it might appear wherein true nobility of birth consisteth, *viz.* in a descent from persons consecrated to the service of God, and of an exemplary piety; and lastly, to assure us, that on the heads of those, who to a holy profession add a holy life,

will,

will, sooner or later, descend the choicest blessings which heaven hath to bestow on the sons of men.

BUT let not such be impatient, because those blessings are for a while deferred. He, who sends them, best knows the proper time of sending them, and often sees it necessary, for many reasons, to exercise the faith and patience of his servants, who may always rest satisfied, that in due season he will bring every thing to pass, which will conduce to their true welfare. The scripture, having witnessed of *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*; that “they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless,” proceedeth, in the very next words, to inform us, that “they had no child, because that Elizabeth was barren, and they were both will stricken in years^a.” They who stand highest in the favour of God, may, therefore, during the greatest part of their lives, want the external and visible marks of it, and lie under the burden

^a Luke i. 7.

SECT. I. of “reproach among men^a,” as was the case of childless women in *Judea*. But these two pious persons, when their condition, in this respect, seemed desperate, were upon the eve of felicity. For of parents at their time of life *John* was to be born; that so the miraculous manner of his birth might excite the attention of mankind, and dispose them to listen to his voice, when it should be heard in the wilderness; and also, that it might prepare them for that great event which was taking place, as the prophet *Isaiab* had foretold; “A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.” In circumstances parallel with those of *St. John*, were born, of old, *Isaac*, and *Joseph*, and *Samson*, and *Samuel*, all of them illustrious forerunners of *Messiah*, in one or other of his three characters, prophetic, sacerdotal, or regal. And did not God intend, by so often causing “the barren woman to keep house, and “and to become a joyful mother of “children,” to make that power known, by which the incarnation of the Redeemer and the fruitfulness of his church

^a Luke i. 25.

were to be effected in the latter days, SECT. I.
 when, according to St. *Paul*, the proph-
 etical injunction of *Isaiab* was obeyed,
 “ Sing, O barren, thou that didst not
 “ bear; break forth into singing, and
 “ cry aloud, thou that didst not travel
 “ with child^a!”

HE who is employed in discharging
 with fidelity the duties of his calling,
 takes the surest way to obtain the con-
 tinuation and increase of his heavenly
 Master's favours. A son was promised
 to *Zacharias*, “ While he executed the
 “ priest's office before God,” as the ri-
 tual of the church enjoined, “ In the
 “ order of his course, and according to
 “ the custom^b.” The reflection of a
 pious writer upon this circumstance is
 no less just than beautiful. “ One priest
 “ alone,” says he, “ intent on his duty,
 “ who diffuses the sweet favour of
 “ Christ, and is constant in prayer,
 “ draws down on the people more bleff-
 “ ings than a great number of negligent
 “ priests. A man ought,” continues he,
 “ to discharge all the ecclesiastical func-

^a *Isai.* liv. 1. *Gal.* iv. 27.

^b *Luke* i. 8, 9.

SECT. I. "tions with the spirit of the sacred mi-
 "nisty, as *before God*, and under his
 "immediate inspection; to perform
 "them *in order*, in his proper station,
 "without ambitiously seeking an high-
 "er; to do nothing merely of his own
 "will, but to observe the well esta-
 "blished *customs*, as being the necessary
 "securities of peace. This is the truth
 "which these shadows prefigured, and
 "these the dispositions worthy a mini-
 "ster of the true *temple*, which is the
 "church."


THE annuntiation of the Baptist's
 conception happened at the time of in-
 cense, when his father, having put on
 the robe of honour, and being clothed,
 like the great Mediator whom he per-
 sonated, with the garments of glory and
 beauty, entered into the temple, while
 the whole congregation of the people,
 assembled without, sent up their united
 prayers to be accepted at the throne of
 grace, through the intercession which
 was then making for them by the levi-
 tical priest, acting in the name of him
 who was to "arise after the order of
 "Melchisedek, and not to be called
 "after

“after the order of Aaron.” While the joint prayers of priest and people were thus offered up with the blood of sprinkling, and the sweet-smelling favour of the holy incense, an angel suddenly appeared to *Zacharias*, as he was executing his office in the temple; that being the place to which those blessed spirits, when they visit these lower regions, ever delight to resort, as bearing the nearest resemblance to the happy mansions from which they descend.

BUT whether it be, that the glory of celestial spirits overpowers the faculties of human nature, or that man, conscious of having sinned against heaven, naturally trembles at the sight of a messenger from thence, we find, the appearance of an angel had the same effect upon *Zacharias*, the blessed virgin, and the shepherds: they were all “fore
“afraid.” Their minds must be first composed, and put into a capacity of receiving the heavenly tidings brought them by the good angels, who, like good men, manifest themselves by the gracious and encouraging manner of

Heb. vii. 11.

their

SECT. I.  their address, and having removed all misconceived apprehensions, proceed to instruct and comfort those to whom they are sent. “Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son^a.” *Zacharias* had prayed for the redemption of *Israel* by *Messiah*, and therefore was honoured by being made, in a wonderful manner, the father of his illustrious forerunner. The priest was anxious for the welfare of the church, and the man was blessed in his own private concerns. He sought “first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” and the blessing of a son was “added unto him.” --- “Thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name JOHN,” that is, being interpreted, the *grace*, or *gift*; “and many shall rejoice at his birth:” not only thou shalt rejoice, and *Elizabeth* with thee, at the birth of a son so long despaired of, and such a son too, but it shall be matter of joy, at the time, to all who look for redemption; and afterwards, thousands and millions shall re-

^a Luke i. 13.

joice at the remembrance of it; the day shall be kept as a festival throughout all generations; with joy and gladness shall it be kept, thanksgiving and the voice of melody. Encouraged by the example of *Zacharias*, let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, be never weary of waiting for his loving kindness in the midst of his temple. Let it be the delight of their lives to execute their office, every one in that order and station in which he is placed. So will God make them to hear of joy and gladness, and grant them to behold the success of their labours for the conversion of sinners, and the edification of his people. The church, like *Elizabeth*, shall bring forth fruit in her old age, and her friends shall rejoice greatly, when they hear that the Lord hath shewed mercy on her^a.

DISTRUST of Providence, and the accomplishment of it's designs, when appearances are on the other side, will sometimes invade the hearts of the best of men; and *Zacharias* himself so far partook of the incredulous spirit which at that period had possessed the syna-

^a Luke i. 58.

SECT. I. gogue, that he "sought after a sign."

--- "Whereby shall I know this? For
 "I am an old man, and my wife well
 "stricken in years." How different, in
 a parallel case, was the behaviour of his
 father *Abraham*, of which *St. Paul* has
 left us the following exalted description.
 --- "Who against hope believed in hope,
 "that he might become the father of
 "many nations, according to that which
 "was spoken, So shall thy seed be.
 "And being not weak in faith, he con-
 "sidered not his own body now dead,
 "neither yet the deadness of Sarah's
 "womb. He staggered not at the pro-
 "mise of God through unbelief, but
 "was strong in faith, giving glory to
 "God, and being fully persuaded, that
 "what he had promised he was able also
 "to perform." The demand of *Zacharias*,
 however, was complied with, and
 a sign was granted him in the punish-
 ment of his unbelief. The use of that
 tongue, which, instead of giving glory
 to God, had been employed in raising
 objections, was taken from him, and a

^a Rom. iv. 18.

silence of some months was imposed as a penance for the abuse of speech. SECT. I.

BUT when the wonderful child was born, who, even before his birth, entered upon his prophetic office, and gave testimony to his Saviour in the womb, then declaring, by his exultation, what he afterward did by words, “Behold the Lamb of God;” and *Zacharias* had acknowledged the GIFT of God, by directing that his name should be JOHN; then the mouth of the father was opened; and, to shew us the proper employment of the tongue, when heaven grants the use of it, he “praised God.” Faith restored what incredulity had taken away; “he believed, and therefore he spake.” And his heart having been prepared, by silence and retirement, for the reception of celestial influences, he was now “filled with the Holy Ghost,” and brake forth into that divine hymn, which shall be the subject of the next section.

SECTION II.

Considerations on the hymn of Zacharias.

SECT. II.

AMONG the alterations in nature, which notify the return of spring, no one is more pleasing, than the exchange of a long and melancholy silence, for that melody which then resoundeth on every side of us, in the woods and fields. *Solomon* hath not forgotten this circumstance, in his short but lovely description of that delightful season. “Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.” The advent of *Messiah* was bannounced, in a similar manner, to the church; and we may say of it, in the words of the Roman poet, which, like those of *Caiaphas*, contained much more

^a Cant. ii. 11.

than

than he was aware of who uttered them, SECT. II.

Aspice, venturo latentur ut omnia sæclo!

For now, the blessed virgin “magnifieth the Lord, and her spirit rejoiceth in God her Saviour:” the father of the Baptist “bleffeth the Lord God of Israel, for having visited and redeemed his people:” the angels themselves descend in full choir, to perform an anthem in honour of their Lord and ours: and old *Simeon* clofeth all with his affecting farewell to the world; “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” Thus did all “break forth into joy, and sing together, because the Lord had comforted his people, and redeemed Jerusalem;” because the sun of righteousness, by his visitation of the earth, was putting a period to a dreary winter, and introducing, in it’s stead, a new and more glorious spring. And as spring is the *morning* of the year, *Cowley’s* address to the material light, which is

C 2 but

SECT. II.

but a faint copy, may be applied to the great original himself;

*When thou lift'st up thy radiant head
Out of the morning's purple bed,
Thy choir of birds about thee play,
And all the joyful world salutes the
rising day.*

THE hymn which we are at present to consider, is that of *Zacharias*. The occasion on which it was indited, was the birth of *St. John*: the subject is the covenant of grace in *Christ Jesus*: the language is that of the *Old Testament*, old terms being transferred to new things: the speaker is a priest and a prophet, "Full of the Holy Ghost."

DURING a tedious interval of silence, *Zacharias* had beheld the accomplishment of the divine promise to himself; and he knew likewise, that the Saviour of mankind would soon be born of his relation, the virgin *Mary*. We may judge, therefore, what pain and grief he felt, while restrained from uttering that "good matter," of which his heart was so full, that when at length God saw fit to remove the mound, it burst forth

forth at once in an impetuous and irresistible torrent of thanksgiving; SECT. II.

I. "BLESSED be the Lord God of
"Israel, for he hath visited and
"redeemed his people".^a

IT was no new thing for "the God
"of Israel" to "visit and redeem his
"people." He had often done it, when
they were in affliction and captivity.
But *so* to visit and redeem, was not all
that he intended to do for his chosen.
Through things temporal he was desirous
that they should look at things eternal,
and carry on their views from a bodily to
a spiritual *redemption*, in which all his
counsels terminated; a *redemption* to be
effected by his *visiting* mankind, dwell-
ing among them in a tabernacle of flesh,
and in that tabernacle offering up the
true propitiatory sacrifice; a *redemption*,
that should extend to Gentiles as well
as Jews, and of both make one *people*,
a new *Israel*, of which he should be *the*
Lord God, for evermore. How gracious
this *visitation*! How astonishing this re-

^a Luke i. 68, &c.

demption!

SECT. II. *redemption!* “Blessed be the Lord God

“of Israel, for he hath visited and re-
“deemed his people,

“And hath raised up an horn of
“salvation for us, in the house
“of his servant David.”

IN the Old Testament, we read con-
tinually of Saviours and Deliverers
“raised up” by God, to rescue his peo-
ple, from time to time, out of the hands
of their oppressors. But of them we
may say, as the Apostle does of the
Levitical priests, “They were not suf-
“fered to continue, by reason of death^a.”
And therefore, we may argue in one
case, as he doth in the other, that none
of them could be the true Saviour of
Israel, the subject of the promises.
Neither *Moses*, who brought them out
of *Egypt*, nor *Joshua* who settled them
in *Canaan*, was “He that should come,”
but they were still to “look for ano-
“ther.” And so on, through the whole
calendar of temporal favours, who,
like the legal ministers, “served only,”

^a Heb. vii. 23.

by their wars and victories, "to the SECT. II.
 "example and shadow of heavenly things." The body, or substance, in
 either instance, "was of Christ." For
 he who arose "a Priest for ever," arose
 also "a King immortal;" a mighty
horn, or power of salvation; a *Moses*, to
 deliver us from this present evil world;
 a *Joshua*, to put us in possession of the
 heavenly *Canaan*; in short, every thing,
 to fill up every prefigurative character.
 This mighty Saviour, this omnipotent
 king of *Israel* God raised up "in the
 "house of his servant David," as he
 had promised, "that of the fruit of his
 "body according to the flesh, he would
 "raise up Christ to sit on his throne^a."
 And to this agree the words of the an-
 gel, at the annuntiation, "The Lord
 "God shall give unto him the throne
 "of his father David, and he shall
 "reign for ever and ever over the house
 "of Jacob, and of his kingdom there
 "shall be no end^b."

^a Psalm cxxxii. 11. Acts ii. 30.

^b Luke i. 32.

SECT. II.

3. "As he promised by the mouth
 "of his holy prophets, which
 "have been since the world
 "began ---"

IN a matter of so great consequence as man's redemption, God left not the world without information, from the beginning: so that wherever we find ignorance, it must be charged to the account of man, as having rejected, and not to that of his Maker, as having denied the necessary means of instruction. We see the christian church now supported, in her belief of Messiah's second advent, on which all her hopes are fixed, by the discourses of the Apostles, as the antient church was supported in her belief of his first advent, by the discourses of the *prophets*. There is no more difficulty in one case than in the other. The ancients lived in faith, and so do we. They died in faith, "not having received the promises," and so must we: for though some promises are fulfilled, yet others are not, nor can be, in this world. Our know-
 lege

lege is not the less certain, nor our faith, built upon it, the less firm, because we have not exact and adequate notions of the manner of Christ's coming, the circumstances of the last judgment, and the glory that is to follow. The *facts* are sufficiently predicted; for an idea of the *mode* we must be contented to wait, till faith shall give place to sight. And let the same observation be applied to the patriarchs and *Israelites*.

4. " --- That we should be saved
 " from our enemies, and from
 " the hand of all that hate us."

THE *enemies* and the *salvation*, here intended by *Zacharias*, are, without doubt, spiritual. Such a salvation therefore, from such enemies, God
 " promised by the mouth of his holy
 " prophets which have been since the
 " world began." When he saved his people of old from *their* enemies, and from the hand of all that hated *them*, his mercy so displayed was a figure for the time then present, a pledge and earnest of eternal redemption; as if he

SECT. II. had said, "Ye shall see greater things
 "than these." And the psalms, formerly
 composed to celebrate the deliverance of
Israel from *Egyptian* and *Babylonian* cap-
 tivities, are now used by the church
 Christian to praise God for salvation
 from sin, death, and Satan: they are
 sung *new* in the kingdom of Mes-
 siah. "Old things are passed away, be-
 hold all things are become new:"
 legal figures are vanished, and the terms
 employed to describe them are transfer-
 red to Evangelical truths. When the
 prophets composed psalms on occasion of
 temporal deliverances, they looked for-
 ward to a future spiritual salvation; as
Zacharias, in his hymn, the subject of
 which is a spiritual salvation, looks
 back, and has a reference to past tem-
 poral deliverances.

5. "To perform the mercy promi-
 "sed to our fathers, and to re-
 "member his holy covenant --"

THE "mercy promised to our fa-
 "thers" was, therefore, a spiritual mer-
 cy; and the "covenant" made with
 them

them was a gospel covenant ; for otherwise, God could not be said, by raising up Christ, to have “performed that “mercy,” and “remembered that covenant.” Accordingly, we are elsewhere told, “the Gospel was preached “to Abraham^a ;” and the covenant made with him is styled “the covenant “of God in Christ^b.” The Gospel, then, was prior to the law, and was the patrimony of all the children of *Abraham*. “The law, which was four hundred and thirty years after,” whatever might be it’s intention, could not dispossess them of this their inheritance ; it could not “disannul the covenant, “and make the promise of none effect.” But if, on the contrary, it was designed to keep up, and further the knowledge of them ; if it was a standing prophecy ; if it was “a schoolmaster,” by it’s elements training up and conducting it’s scholars “to Christ ;” then certainly nothing was wanting on the part of God. The Jews minded earthly things ; but to infer from thence, that they were never

^a Gal. iii. 8.

^b *Ibid.* 17.

SECT. II. taught the knowlege of things heavenly, would be a method of arguing too hazardous to be ventured upon; since, from the behaviour of many, who profess the Christian religion, it might as fairly be concluded, that *their* Master promised nothing but “loaves and fishes.” *Israelites* might set their hearts too much on “fields and vineyards,” forgetting or neglecting better things, as men are apt to do, who are blessed with prosperity in this present world. But when they did so, they did wrong: prophets were sent to reprove the error, and judgments to convince them, that *Canaan* was not the end of the “covenant,” nor a plentiful harvest “the mercy promised.”

6. “THE oath which he sware to our forefather Abraham ---”

THE amazing condescension of God in vouchsafing, for man’s satisfaction and assurance, to confirm his promise by an oath, is finely touched upon in the epistle to the *Hebrews*. “When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he
“sware

“sware by himself, saying, surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee ---- For men verily swear by a greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing to shew to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before us^a.” O the goodness of God, who hath given his creatures the assurance of an oath! O the infidelity of his creatures, who distrust that assurance^b!

7. “---- That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear,

^a Heb. vi. 13.

^b O beatos nos, quorum causa Deus jurat! O miserimos, si nec juranti Domino credimus! Tertull.

8. “ In

SECT. II.

8. "IN holiness and righteousness
 "before him, all the days of
 "our life."

THE promise, made with an oath to *Abraham*, was made, after the intentional sacrifice of *Isaac*, in the following terms; "By myself have I sworn
 "--- that in blessing I will bless thee,
 "and in multiplying I will multiply
 "thy seed as the stars of heaven, and
 "as the sand which is upon the sea
 "shore; and thy seed shall possess the
 "gate of his enemies; and in thy seed
 "shall all the nations of the earth be
 "blessed^a." The objects of the blessing here promised are the faithful children of *Abraham*, whether Jews or Gentiles; the "seed," in whom they are blessed, is Christ; the manner in which he obtains the blessing, is by "possessing the gate of his enemies," that is, by subduing them, and seizing their strong holds; the blessing itself consisteth in a redemption from bondage under those enemies, and an admission into

^a Gen. xxii. 16.



the service of God. Such is the substance and intention of the promise made with an oath to *Abraham*, as explained by *Zacharias*, and fulfilled under the gospel. In the mean time, between the promise and it's accomplishment it pleased God to interpose a dispensation, which exhibited a visible representation of this great and important transaction, in the case of the children of *Israel*, or the posterity of *Abraham* according to the flesh, who, after having been long detained in cruel bondage by *Pharaoh* and the *Egyptians*, were "delivered out of the hands of "their enemies;" and delivered for this purpose, that they might serve God with a prefigurative service, calculated to last "till the seed should come, to "whom the promise was made." For thus Jehovah saith to *Moses*, "When "thou hast brought forth the people "out of Egypt, they shall serve God "upon this mountain^a." So that when, at the transfiguration of our Lord upon mount *Tabor*, *Moses* discoursed with him on the subject of "his decease,"

^a Exod. iii. 12.

or,

SECT. II. or, as it is in the original, his EXODUS,

“ which he should accomplish at Jerusalem,” may we not imagine to ourselves the deliverer of *Israel* addressing the world’s Redeemer in some such words as these --- By my hand the Lord God of *Israel* did once vouchsafe to bring forth his people from the afflicting bondage of *Egypt*; but thou shalt turn the multitude of the Gentiles from the power of Satan to God. I saw the Lord make a path through the waters, for his redeemed to pass over; but thou shalt find a more wonderful way through the waves of death; and though the floods shall compass thee about, yet shall thy life be brought up from corruption. I beheld the chariots of *Pbaraoth* and the mighty host of *Egypt* plunging in the deep, when the morning appeared; but thou shalt triumph over principalities and powers, and see them overwhelmed in the lake of fire. I led my people through the wilderness, and gave them a law which had “ the shadow of good things to come;” but thou shalt conduct thine through the world, and teach them to “ worship in spirit and
“ in

“in truth.” I went before *Israel* to SECT. II,
 the borders of the promised land; but
 thou art the true shepherd of souls, and
 they who follow thee shall “pass from
 “death unto life.”

Zacharias concludes his divine song
 with an apostrophe to the infant Bap-
 tist, as one who was designed by provi-
 dence to be the precursor of such a
 Saviour, and the publisher of such sal-
 vation.

9. “And thou child shalt be called
 “the prophet of the Highest,
 “for thou shalt go before the
 “face of the Lord, to prepare
 “his ways;

10. “To give knowlege of salvation
 “unto his people for the remis-
 “sion of their sins ---”

“THE law *prophested* until John,”
 who succeeded it in it’s office of point-
 ing out the Messiah, and spake the lan-
 guage of it’s institutions, when he said,
 “Behold the Lamb of God, which
 “taketh away the sin of the world.”

SECT. II.

“Remission of sins” is the doctrine in which the Christian religion justly glorieth, as that most necessary and fundamental point, in which every other religion fails. The heathen confesseth himself to be in the dark; he guesseth only what is the will of God, whom he knoweth not. He hath not strength to perform what he imagineth to be such; and he understandeth not the meaning of the sacrifices and lustrations derived to him by tradition. The blood of bulls and goats cannot wash away the sins of the Jew; and his oblations, since the truth is come, which they were intended to prefigure, are preposterous, and impious. The Mahometan hath no evidence for the mission of his prophet, no argument for his religion but the sword, and no heaven but sense. The doctrine of “salvation by the remission of sins,” through faith in a Redeemer, was, from the beginning, the sum and substance of true religion, which subsisted in promise, prophecy, and figure, till *John* preached their accomplishment in the person of *Jesus*. Paganism was a corruption of it before

before that time, as Mahometism hath SECT. II.
been since; and modern Judaism is an
apostasy from it. And will Christians
go away, and forsake their Redeemer?
To whom can they go? He hath the
words of eternal life: he only can give
“salvation by the remission of sins.” It
is this religion which enlightens the un-
derstanding with true knowlege, and
warms the heart with true charity: it
is this which alone brings confidence,
and comfort, and joy, and bids fear and
despondency fly away: it is this which
raises the soul, as it were, from the
dead, puts new vigour into all her
powers and faculties, and animates her
to duty, by the powerful motives it
suggesteth: it is this which is a coun-
terbalance to the temptations of sense,
by the promises made to our faith;
which supports the infirmity of nature
by the glorious objects proposed to our
hope; and which triumphs over the
opposition of the world, by the love of
God shed abroad in our hearts: it pro-
cures us the only solid happiness there
is in this world, and opens a way to the
felicities of the next: it holds him out

SECT. II.

to us, who is our “shield” on earth, and will be our “exceeding great reward” in heaven; who “guides us with his counsel, and will, after that, receive us to glory --- Whom have we in heaven, O Lord, but thee; and there is none upon earth we can desire in comparison of thee^a!”

11. “--- Through the tender mercy
“of our God; whereby the day-
“spring from on high hath vi-
“sited us,

12. “To give light to them that sit
“in darkness, and in the shadow
“of death, to guide our feet
“into the way of peace.”

St. *John* was the morning-star, that preceded the sun of righteousness at his rising; an event, the glory of which is due to “the tender mercy of our God,” since towards the production of it man could do no more than he can do towards causing the natural sun to rise upon the earth. The blessed effects of the day-

^a Psalm lxxiii. 24.

spring which then dawned from on SECT. II.
high, and gradually increased more and more unto the perfect day, were --- the dispersion of ignorance, which is the darkness of the intellectual world; the awakening of men from sin, which is the sleep of the soul; and the conversion and direction of their hearts and inclinations into "the way of peace," that is, of reconciliation to God by the blood of Christ, to themselves by the answer of a conscience cleansed from sin, and to one another by mutual love. "Happy is the people that is in such a case; yea, happy is the people, whose God is the Lord. They are the children of the light and of the day. Their sun shall no more go down, neither shall their moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light, and the days of their mourning shall be ended."

SECTION III.

Considerations on St. John's education in the desarts.

SECT. III.

ALL the information we have concerning St. *John*, from the time of his birth to that of his public appearance, is contained in the few following words --- “ And the child grew, “ and waxed strong in spirit, and was “ in the desarts till the day of his shewing unto Israel ^a.” There, apart from the world, and under the tuition of heaven, he was catechized in the principles of divine wisdom, initiated into the mystery of a holy life, and perfected in the discipline of self-denial ;

*The moss his bed, the cave his humble cell,
His food the fruits, his drink the chrystal well :
Remote from man, with God he pass'd the days,
Pray'r all his bus'ness, all his pleasure praise.*

PARNELL.

^a Luke i. 80.

THIS

THIS dispensation in the case of the SECT. III. Baptist, like many others relative to the prophets, was extraordinary and miraculous; consequently, not to be literally copied by any one, but in similar circumstances, and under a supernatural direction. Nor has the monastic scheme the sanction of so great an example; as SECT. III. St. *John* was under the obligation of no vow, but having finished his preparation in solitude, came forth to act his part upon the theatre of the world. And it is well known, that, even in those ages when mankind stood astonished at the austerities practised by recluses and eremites, the episcopal or sacerdotal character was reckoned as much superior to the other, as charity is better than contemplation. “In solitude,” saith a great master of this subject, “a man may go to heaven by the way of prayer and devotion; but in society he carries others with him by the way of mercy and charity. In solitude there are fewer temptations, but then there is likewise the exercise of fewer virtues. Solitude is a good school, and the world the best theatre.

“The

SECT. III. “The institution is best there, the
 “ practice here. The wilderness hath
 “ the advantage of discipline, but so-
 “ ciety furnisheth the opportunities of
 “ perfection.” To confirm this judi-
 cious state of the case, it may be ob-
 served, that the only perfect life which
 hath ever been led on earth, was a
 mixture of the solitary and social. Our
 Lord himself passed thirty years in the
 privacy of *Nazareth*, and then appeared
 in public to exercise his ministry; but
 still not without frequent intervals of
 retirement. “It was in solitude that
 “ he kept his vigils; the desert places
 “ heard him pray; in the wilderness he
 “ vanquished Satan; upon a mountain
 “ apart he was transfigured.” But in
 public he preached the Gospel, and
 converted souls; in public he healed
 the sick, and cast out devils; in public
 he suffered, and, while he redeemed the
 world, set it a pattern of humility, pa-
 tience, and charity.

FROM the circumstance of St. *John's*
 education in the deserts we may, there-
 fore, venture to draw a conclusion which
 will be of general use, with regard to
 all

all ministers of the Gospel, viz. that SECT. III. the solitary way of life is necessary to qualify them for the offices of the social; or, that he who would serve God acceptably in public, must first prepare himself for that purpose in private. The reason is, because no man is properly qualified to teach *wisdom* and *holiness*, who doth not himself possess them. And a little reflection will convince us, how needful retirement is for the acquisition of both.

THE toils undergone by all who have ever made any great proficiency in *wisdom*, plainly prove close application and deep attention to be requisite for it's attainment. And they who imagine themselves to have discovered a shorter way, conducting them to it without study, will find, sooner or later, that they have mistaken their road. "Hardly
 " do we guess aright at things that are
 " upon earth, and with labour do we
 " find the things that are before us^a:" shall we then expect a knowlege of those which are of a high and spiritual nature, without any labour at all? The

^a Wisdom. ix. 16.

SECT. III. prophets themselves “enquired and
 “searched diligently what things the
 “spirit of Christ, which was in them,
 “did signify^a.” The royal Preacher,
 endued from above with “largeness of
 “heart as the sand upon the sea shore,”
 yet took pains, and those no slight ones,
 in the invention and disposition of his
 discourses. For, “in order to teach the
 “people knowlege, he gave good heed,
 “and sought out and set in order many
 “proverbs; yea, the preacher sought
 “to find out acceptable words, words
 “of uprightness and truth^b.” And if
Solomon were not exempted from study
 and meditation, no other man can have
 any title to hope for such a privilege.

BUT who shall be able to fix his at-
 tention, amidst the hurry and dissipa-
 tion of life? Who can meditate on
 wisdom, with the noise of folly sound-
 ing incessantly in his ears? That blessed
 person, who could suffer no distraction
 of thought from the objects around
 him, withdrew from the multitude, that
 he might teach us to do the same, who,

^a 1 Pet. i. 10.

^b Eccles. xii. 9.

alas, are often unable, when alone, to confine our thoughts, for a few minutes together, to one subject. The world, like *Martha*, is “troubled about many “things;” and most about those which are of least concern; so that, besides the profane, the unseemly, and uncharitable discourses, which they must hear who are much conversant with it, the mind of a man suffers not a little from the variety of light and unprofitable conversation in which he is frequently engaged. This scatters the thoughts, and so indisposes them for any speculations that are great and noble, sublime and sacred, that some time is required to reduce the wanderers, to compose the spirits, and to restore that tranquillity of soul which is indispensably necessary for the prosecution of religious enquiries. And although the general assertion of a famous recluse, “that he always came out of company “a worse man than he went into it,” savoureth too much of the cloister, yet whoever, as the world goes, should diligently note the times when he came out of company a *better* man than he

SECT. III. went into it, might, perhaps, find his
 ~~~~~ diary contained in a less compass, than  
 at present he is apt to imagine.

CERTAIN, however, it is, that for  
 the productions of wisdom we are in-  
 debted to solitude, as the parent of at-  
 tention. And therefore many, in all  
 ages, have followed St. *John* into the  
 wilderness, and chosen retirement, not  
 out of any moroseness of temper, or  
 misanthropy, but that they might give  
 themselves, without let or molestation,  
 to the pursuit of divine knowlege. In  
 this situation, they found themselves al-  
 ways at liberty to chuse their compa-  
 nions. They could converse at pleasure  
 with patriarchs and prophets, apostles,  
 martyrs, and confessors, with devout  
 and learned bishops, and others, who  
 once adorned the church by their lives,  
 and have continued, since their deaths,  
 through many generations, to edify her  
 by their writings. Here they could  
 rally their scattered thoughts, and fix  
 them upon subjects, whence they might  
 extract real profit, and durable pleasure.  
 For meditations, while employed, in a  
 general and cursory way, upon a variety  
 of

of objects; like the rays of light diffused in the air, discover not the force and activity which they possess; it is close attention which collects and unites, and renders them operative. And an ability to bestow that close attention in a crowd, is granted to very few among the sons of men.

A DISPASSIONATE and unprejudiced state of mind is another requisite for the attainment of true wisdom. And as our sentiments take the tincture of our company, persons continually engaged in the world are very liable to be corrupted, as well as dissipated. He who passeth his time with men of base and antisciptural tenets, will insensibly become one of them, and will find, when it is too late, that “evil communications corrupt” good principles; as well as “good manners.” The understanding will be blinded, and the heart hardened: wisdom will be shut out at every avenue; and the man will sit down in darkness and depravity, for the remainder of his days, determining with himself that there is no such thing as truth, without ever being at the trouble of making the enquiry.


SECT. III. enquiry. Happy, therefore, is he who, like St. *John*, spendeth his early days in privacy, and there acquainteth himself betimes with the excellencies and perfections of divine wisdom. For  
 “Wisdom is glorious, and never fadeth  
 “away; yea, she is easily seen of them  
 “that love her, and found of such as  
 “seek her. She preventeth them that  
 “desire her, in making herself first  
 “known unto them. Whoso seeketh  
 “her early shall have no great travel,  
 “for he shall find her sitting at his  
 “doors<sup>a</sup>.”

UPON the same principle, we may account it one of the no small advantages which St. *John* enjoyed by his retreat into the wilderness, that he was thereby delivered from the vain janglings of the many religious sects and factions, at that time in *Judea*. For the authors and abettors of such are naturally confined in their views, and obstructed in their search after truth, by having assumed it for a first principle, that “they are the men, and that wis-

<sup>a</sup> Wisdom. vi. 12.

“them.”



“them.” Hence they become more SECT. III.  
solicitous about the defence of their own   
particularities against those of other sec-  
taries, than careful to advance and pro-  
pagate the general principles of true re-  
ligion. This hath been but too much  
the case for some time past in Christen-  
dom, which, like *Jerusalem* before it's  
destruction, is crumbled into innumer-  
able parties, biting and devouring one  
another; insomuch that it is now diffi-  
cult for one writer to lay down a posi-  
tion in theology, which another shall  
not immediately set himself to contro-  
vert with all his might, as heretical and  
antichristian. The dispute soon becomes  
a trial of skill, and the passions and pre-  
judices of the combatants spread a cloud  
over the question, in which truth and  
charity often vanish together. Thus  
dark and tempestuous are these lower  
regions. But, by study and meditation  
in solitude, the Christian, in heart and  
mind, ascendeth to a purer element,  
from whence he beholdeth the storms  
produced by contending factions far be-  
neath him, and expatiateth at pleasure  
in those fields of light and serenity,  
which

SECT. III. which open themselves on all sides to his view. He consoleth himself by contemplating the church, as she formerly subsisted in original purity and unity, and as she will hereafter exist in her triumphant state above, when her members of every age and nation shall all lift up their voices together, and make their sound to be heard as one, in giving Glory to God, and to the Lamb. Disencumbered of passions and prejudices, he followeth after the truth which leadeth to godliness, and the wisdom whose end is salvation.

FOR the attainment of that wisdom a third thing requisite is divine illumination. Wisdom is one of those “good  
 “and perfect gifts,” which “come  
 “down from the Father of lights,” and must be sued for, with humility and fervour, in petitions like these --- “Give  
 “me wisdom that sitteth by thy throne,  
 “and reject me not from among thy  
 “children --- For though a man be  
 “never so perfect among the children  
 “of men, yet if thy wisdom be not  
 “with him, he shall be nothing re-  
 “garded --- O send her out of thy holy  
 “heavens,

“ heavens, and from the throne of thy  
 “ glory, that being present she may la-  
 “ bour with me, that I may know what  
 “ is pleasing unto thee. For she know-  
 “ eth and understandeth all things, and  
 “ she shall lead me soberly in my do-  
 “ ings, and preserve me by her power  
 “ --- For what man is he that can  
 “ know the counsel of God ; or who  
 “ can think what the will of the Lord  
 “ is, except thou give wisdom, and send  
 “ thy Holy Spirit from above<sup>a</sup> ?” Such  
 gracious promises are made, and are  
 ready to be fulfilled to the retired Chris-  
 tian. Let but the pollutions and dis-  
 tractions of the world be removed, and  
 the wisdom which “ is first pure, and  
 “ then peaceable,” will enter in. To  
 receive the law, *Moses* was called away  
 from the congregation to the top of the  
 mount. *Ezekiel* beheld the visions of  
 God, while a solitary captive upon the  
 banks of *Chebar*. *Daniel* was informed  
 concerning the restoration of *Jerusalem*,  
 and the advent of *Messiah*, on the even-  
 ing of a day dedicated to retirement,  
 for the purposes of fasting and prayer.

<sup>a</sup> *Wisd.* ix. 4.

SECT. III.

St. *John* was an exile in the desolate *Patmos*, when the glorious scenes described in the book of Revelation were made to pass before him, and he was enabled to extend his view, through all the different revolutions of empires, and periods of the church, to the end of time. And although we no more look for visions and revelations from heaven, yet from thence we expect, according to the most sure promise of our Master, the gift of the Spirit, to bless and prosper us in our studies, to open to us the scriptures, and our understandings, that we may understand them. The same Spirit that gave the word, giveth likewise the interpretation thereof. And the latter, as well as the former, is best received in solitude, which appears to be thus admirably calculated for the attainment of *wisdom*, as it requireth study and attention, a dispassionate and unprejudiced mind, and that illumination which is from on high.

SIN, in the language of scripture, is styled *folly*, to intimate to us, that true *wisdom* and *holiness* are inseparable companions. That, therefore, which

con-

conduces to the acquisition of one, SECT. III.  
can never bear an unfavourable aspect  
towards the other; and solitude will be  
found the best nurse of *sanctity*, more  
particularly as it consisteth in the exer-  
cise of mortification.

THIS is a work which no man can  
set about, until he knoweth what those  
failings are, to which he is subject. And  
such is the power of self-love, that the  
person concerned is generally the last  
who comes to a knowledge of this most  
important point. If neither the fidelity  
of his friends nor the malice of his ene-  
mies let him into the secret, there is  
only a third way in which it is possible  
for him to become master of it, which  
is self-examination, constantly, sincerely,  
and thoroughly practised. And this re-  
quireth stated seasons of retirement;  
for want of which, we see those, who  
are engaged in a circle of business, or  
pleasures, living entire strangers to them-  
selves and their own infirmities, though  
intimately acquainted with the follies  
and foibles of all around them. "In  
"the night," the psalmist tells us, he  
"communed with his own heart, and

SECT. III. "his spirit made diligent search <sup>a</sup>."

Then silence and solitude afforded him an opportunity of scrutinizing the tempers of his soul, of discovering the maladies to which he was inclined, and of applying the proper remedies to each.

THAT medicines may be administered with success, it is necessary to cut off the provisions, which nourish and increase the disorder. The world, in the case before us, is full of such provisions; and therefore the patient must withdraw, for a while, from the influence of it's temptations. "Where no wood is, the fire goeth out <sup>b</sup>." Remove the object, and the passion will by degrees die away. In solitude, the pleasures and glories of the world no longer strike upon the senses, and solicit the affections. The soul, therefore, in this situation, like one escaped out of a battle to a place of security, hath leisure to reflect upon her condition, and to provide for her future safety. By looking into herself, she perceiveth how much she standeth in need of mercy

<sup>a</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 6.

<sup>b</sup> Prov. xxvi. 20.

and grace; and then she is naturally led to look up to heaven, as the only place from whence they are to be obtained. The former of these prospects filleth her with compunction, and causeth her to mourn for her sins with that godly sorrow which worketh a repentance never to be repented of; the latter encourageth her to pour forth herself in continual prayer to the God of her salvation, until he have mercy upon her. St. Peter, when reminded of his offence by the crowing of the cock, and the affectionate look of an abjured Master, went out from the high priest's hall where he was, and in solitude, with strong crying and tears, made supplication for pardon and peace. In retirement it is, that we find ourselves best able to practise all the holy arts of abstinence and self-denial, so needful for the perfecting repentance by mortifying the whole body of sin.

WHEN men cannot be induced voluntarily to take this course, they are often forced into it by Providence visiting them with some heavy calamity, which by a stroke, like the amputation of

SECT. III. of a limb, severe but salutary, separating them at once from the world, shall oblige them to converse first with themselves, and then with God. Thus was *Babylon's* haughty monarch driven, in an extraordinary manner, from society, to learn humility in the fields and woods, until he acknowledged the power and the righteousness of the King of heaven. And thus the idolatrous and superlatively wicked *Manasseh* became a sincere and hearty penitent in the solitude of a *Chaldean* prison. Nor can we but admire, upon this occasion, the wisdom and goodness of God in sending sickness, as a preparative for death. Sickness takes a man, as it were, out of this scene of things, to fit him for another. It draws the curtain between him and the world, shutting out all it's cares, and all it's pleasures. It puts away his idle and noisy acquaintance far from him; and having thus secured his attention to the one thing needful, gives him ideas of the nature of sin, and the importance of death, the vanities of time, and the glories of eternity, to which he was before an utter stranger.



Now appear to him, in their proper SECT. III. colours and natural deformity, the diabolical nature of pride and envy, the brutality of intemperance, the folly and torment of lasciviousness, the wretchedness of avarice, and the stupidity of sloth. Now he hath no longer any unlawful desires, and grieves that he ever had such. Now he is what he always ought to have been, and what retirement, at proper seasons, should and would have made him.

IN morality, as in husbandry, the preparation of the soil is a great step towards the production of a plentiful harvest. If carnal desires are dead in us, all things belonging to the Spirit will live and grow in us. If the affections are disengaged from things on earth, the difficulty of the work is over; they will readily and eagerly lay hold on things above, when proposed to them. If the snare of concupiscence be broken, and the soul be delivered out of it, she will presently fly away, on the wings of faith and charity, towards heaven. They who have duly practised mortification in the school of retirement, will,

at

SECT. III. at their appearance in the world, afford  
 it the brightest examples of every thing  
 that is “ honest, just, pure, lovely, and  
 “ of good report.”

WE may, therefore, conclude, that  
 he who desires to undertake the office  
 of guiding others in the ways of *wis-*  
*dom* and *holiness*, will best qualify him-  
 self for that purpose by first passing some  
 time in a state of sequestration from the  
 world; where anxious cares and delu-  
 sive pleasures may not break in upon  
 him, to dissipate his attention; where  
 no sceptical or sectarian spirit may blind  
 his understanding, and nothing may  
 obstruct the illumination from above;  
 where every vicious inclination may be  
 mortified through grace, by a prudent  
 application of the proper means; and  
 every fresh bud of virtue, sheltered from  
 noxious blasts, may be gradually reared  
 up into strength, beauty, and fragrance;  
 where, in a word, “ he may grow and  
 “ wax strong in spirit, until the day of  
 “ his shewing unto Israel.”

## SECTION IV.

*Considerations on the Prophecies relative to St. John in the Old Testament.*

**B**EFORE we proceed to view the SECT. IV.  
 Baptist in the exercise of his ministry, it will be proper to look back to the predictions in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, concerning his office and character. We shall begin with that remarkable one, “ Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come, and smite the earth with a curse <sup>a</sup>.”

As there was amongst the Jews a general expectation of Messiah’s appearance, at the time when he did appear, so an opinion likewise prevailed, that the world should be first prepared for his reception, in some extraordinary

<sup>a</sup> Mal. iv. 5; 6.

H

manner.

SECT. IV. manner. But wrong ideas of his appearance and kingdom introduced mistakes with regard to the person who should precede and proclaim him. According to the notions then current, occasioned by applying to his first advent the prophecies which belonged to his second, Messiah was to come in power and majesty, to confer on the sons of *Jacob* dominion over the Gentiles, and make *Jerusalem* the metropolis of the world. And by misunderstanding this prediction of *Malachi*, they had imagined, that *Elijah* the *Tisbite* should return from heaven, as his precursor. For this reason it was, that when the sanhedrim sent a message to St. *John*, desiring to know, whether he were *Elias*? he answered, "I am not:" not the *Elias* by them intended and expected. But that St. *John* was the person foretold by *Malachi* under the name of *Elias*, we have the declarations of our Lord himself to his own disciples, "Elias is indeed come<sup>a</sup>;" and to the Jews, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come. He

<sup>a</sup> Mark ix. 13.

" that

“that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” SECT. IV.

By these expressions it was evidently Christ's intention to put his hearers upon the search after something more than the words, in the bare letter of them, might seem to contain. He directed them to go deeper into things, to study with attention the mission of the Baptist, his office and character; to compare together persons, times, and events; and so to discover, in what sense *John* was *Elias*, and why *Malachi* had given him that appellation. But if they did this, and were once brought, in the person of *John*, to acknowledge *Elias* who was to precede the Messiah, they must necessarily, in the person of *Jesus*, acknowledge the Messiah whom *Elias* was to precede. And therefore, as they were obstinately resolved not to own the Master, Christ knew they would not recognize the servant, or receive this saying concerning him. Thus when the chief priests and elders interrogated our Lord in the temple, “By what authority dost thou these things, or who gave thee this authority? I will

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xi. 14.

SECT. IV. "also," said he, "ask you one question; "The baptism of John, was it from "heaven, or of men?" They perceived the dilemma, and having considered consequences, made the only *safe* answer, "We cannot tell<sup>a</sup>;" an answer which did honour to their prudence and their caution, but certainly at the expence either of their wisdom, or their honesty. As sitting in the chair of *Moses*, they ought to have known whence the baptism of *John* was; and if they did know, they ought not to have been shy of declaring it.

THAT St. *John* was the *Elias* predicted by *Malachi*, we have also the testimony of the angel<sup>b</sup>, at the annuntiation of his birth, who cites the very words of the prophet; "He shall go "before him in the spirit and power of "Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers "to the children" &c. And if this be the case, it follows by necessary inference, that by "the great and dreadful "day of the Lord," before the coming of which *Elijah* is promised, *Malachi*


<sup>a</sup> Matt. xxi. 23.

<sup>b</sup> Luke i. 7.

intends,


intends, primarily and immediately, the SECT. IV. day, not of the world's, but of *Jerusalem's* destruction. For want of advert-  
 ing to this, an opinion hath prevailed among Christian interpreters, that the whole prophecy relateth principally to the day of judgment, and to the appearance of an *Elias*, who shall then precede Christ. Whether there will be such an *Elias* at that time, and so the second advent will symbolize with the first in the circumstance of being previously proclaimed by a harbinger, like St. *John*, sent for that purpose, is a speculation with which we shall not at present concern ourselves, resting satisfied with the application of the prophecy, upon infallible grounds, to the person of the Baptist, the undoubted forerunner of our Lord, when he came to visit us in great humility.


GOD punisheth not sinners, till he hath first invited them to repentance. He giveth fair warning before he striketh; and a day of grace, in which mercy may be sought, and pardon found, always goeth before a day of vengeance and extermination. *Elias* was sent “be-  
 “ fore

SECT. IV.  fore the coming of the great and  
 “dreadful day of the Lord;” *John* call-  
 ed his countrymen to turn from their  
 sins, and believe in their Messiah, e’er  
 yet the desolations of *Jerusalem* exhibit-  
 ed to the wondering nations a specimen  
 of that almighty power and inflexible  
 justice, which shall one day lay the  
 world itself in ruins.

THE third chapter of *Malachi* con-  
 taineth a most evident and clear pre-  
 diction of Messiah’s advent, with that  
 of his precursor *St. John*. “Behold, I  
 “will send my messenger, and he shall  
 “prepare the way before me; and the  
 “Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly  
 “come to his temple, even the messen-  
 “ger of the covenant whom ye delight  
 “in: behold he shall come, saith the  
 “Lord of hosts.” The prophet goes  
 on to foretell the effects of Christ’s ad-  
 vent in the selection of a peculiar peo-  
 ple, and the purification of a new priest-  
 hood, to offer new and acceptable of-  
 ferings. “But who may abide the day  
 “of his coming, and who shall stand,  
 “when he appeareth? For he is like a  
 “refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap.  
 And



“ And he shall sit as a refiner and puri- SECT. IV.  
 “ fier of silver ; and he shall purify the   
 “ sons of Levi, and purge them as gold  
 “ and silver, that they may offer unto  
 “ the Lord an offering in righteousness.  
 “ Then shall the offering of Judah and  
 “ Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord,  
 “ as in the days of old, and as in for-  
 “ mer years ;” pleasant as in the days  
 when their fathers offered in faith, and  
 the desire of Messiah’s appearance was  
 the ruling passion of their souls. The  
 rest of the chapter is employed in re-  
 proving the rebellion, sacrilege, and in-  
 fidelity of the Jews ; and the fourth  
 chapter opens with a description of the  
 day fatal to *Jerusalem* --- “ Behold the  
 “ day cometh that shall burn as an oven,  
 “ and all the proud, yea and all that do  
 “ wickedly shall be stubble, and the day  
 “ that cometh shall burn them up, saith  
 “ the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave  
 “ them neither root nor branch.” For  
 the consolation of the faithful, God by  
 his prophet again foretelleth Messiah’s  
 advent, with the increase, victory, and  
 triumph of the church --- “ But unto  
 “ you that fear my name, shall the SUN

SECT. IV.  OF RIGHTEOUSNESS arise, with  
 “ healing in his wings ; and ye shall go  
 “ forth, and grow up as the firstlings  
 “ of bullocks : and ye shall tread down  
 “ the wicked, for they shall be ashes  
 “ under the soles of your feet, in the  
 “ day that I shall do this, saith the Lord  
 “ of hosts.” In the mean time, “ Re-  
 “ member ye the law of Moses my ser-  
 “ vant, which I commanded unto him  
 “ in Horeb for all Israel, with the sta-  
 “ tutes and judgments.” And then,  
 when the law hath done it’s office, and  
 prophesied for the appointed time,  
 “ Behold I will send you Elijah the  
 “ prophet ;” not the personal Elijah,  
 but, as the angel expoundeth it, one  
 to preach and live after the model of  
 his example, in his “ spirit and power.”  
 Thus, in the prophecy of *Ezekiel*, where  
 God foretelleth the union of *Israel* and  
*Judah* in the days of *Messiah*, he saith,  
 “ They shall be my people, and I will  
 “ be their God, and David my servant  
 “ shall be their prince for ever <sup>a</sup>.” Not  
 that *Christ* was to be *David* risen from  
 the dead, or, when he came, was to

<sup>a</sup> Ezek. xxxvii. 23.

bear his name, but was to be, in certain respects, like *David*, conquering the enemies, and sitting upon the throne of *Israel*. So the forerunner of Messiah was not to be *Elijah* descended from heaven, nor was he, at his manifestation, to be called by that name, but was to be like him in his office and character. Such a messenger, saith God, "I will send, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," that is, the day that should "burn like an oven," the day of *Jerusalem's* destruction, mentioned in the first verse. "And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth," or "the land, with a curse." In the citation of this passage by the angel, one part of it is paraphrased --- "To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just<sup>a</sup>." The meaning of the whole seems to be, either, that men of every age and every disposition should be united in truth and charity; or, as some

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 17.

SECT. IV. learned expositors understand the passage, that St. *John* should bring many of the Jews to have the same heart and mind which their fathers and progenitors had, who feared God, and believed his promises; that so their fathers might, as it were, rejoice in them, and own them again for their children; in other words, that he should convert them to the faith of that Christ whom their fathers hoped in, and looked for; as it was said by the angel, “ Many of the children  
“ of Israel shall he turn to the Lord  
“ their God <sup>a</sup> ;” lest, all continuing obstinate in their unbelief, till the day when a rejected Saviour should visit an apostate people, the curse should be universal.

BESIDES these notices afforded us by *Malachi*, there is a prophecy on the same subject in the XL<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Isaiab*, to which St. *John* referred the priests and levites, when they pressed him, saying, “ Who art thou, that we  
“ may give an answer to them that sent  
“ us? What sayest thou of thyself?  
“ He said, I am the voice of one crying

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 16.

“ in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias<sup>a</sup>.” But let us take a view of the whole context, as far as it concerns our present purpose.

ISAIA. XL. I. “ Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.”

THE future manifestation of Christ's kingdom is represented to the prophet in spirit, with the concomitant signs and circumstances of it. He hears the voice of God directing his servants to comfort his people, by proclaiming certain glad tidings which had been communicated to them. These glad tidings were the tidings of the Gospel. The persons to whom they first came were *Zacharias*, the blessed Virgin, *Simeon*, and *Anna*, who composed sacred songs upon the occasion, and spake of Messiah's advent “ to all such as looked for redemption in Jerusalem<sup>b</sup>.” The same tidings were afterwards published by the Baptist, then by Christ himself and his

<sup>a</sup> John i. 23.

<sup>b</sup> Luke ii. 38.

SECT. IV. apostles, and have been ever since  
 preached by their successors, whose  
 commission still runs --- "Comfort ye,  
 " comfort ye my people."

2. "SPEAK ye comfortably to Jeru-  
 " salem, and cry unto her, that  
 " her warfare is accomplished,  
 " that her iniquity is pardoned :  
 " for she hath received of the  
 " Lord's hand double for all her  
 " sins."

GOOD news should be related with  
 a suitable aspect and accent. The man-  
 ner should correspond with the matter.  
 "Speak ye comfortably," or, as it is in  
 the Hebrew phraseology, "to the heart  
 " of Jerusalem ;" let your words be as  
 cordials, to revive and cheer her in the  
 midst of her sorrows and sufferings.  
 The topics of consolation, to be insisted  
 on, are three. First, "Her warfare,"  
 or "appointed service, is accomplished ;"  
 the days of her continuance under the  
 yoke of bondage are expired ; the ful-  
 ness of time is come, for her passing  
 from that state into the glorious liberty  
 of

of the sons of God; she will now be relieved from duty, and dismissed from the station on which she hath so long watched, in expectation of the promised redemption; she will be “delivered out of the hands of her enemies, to serve God without fear.” Secondly, “Her iniquity is pardoned;” the expiation is about to be made, which all her sacrifices and lustrations prefigured, which all her prophets foretold; the blessed person is born, in whom God is well pleased, both granting and accepting repentance unto “salvation by the remission of sins,” that men may be “justified from all things from which they could not be justified BY the law of Moses,” although men were justified UNDER that dispensation, through faith in him that was then to come, according to the Gospel preached before unto *Abraham*. Thirdly, “She hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins;” she hath received greater benefits than she had deserved punishments; mercy hath rejoiced against judgment; where sin abounded, grace hath superabounded.

## SECT. IV.

3. "THE voice of him that crieth  
 " in the wilderness, prepare ye  
 " the way of the Lord, make  
 " straight in the desert a high  
 " way for our God."

ISAIAH, while reciting the divine injunctions to those whose office it should be to "comfort Jerusalem," seemeth to break off suddenly, as one interrupted in his discourse by the sound of a voice. And as if he had listened, and perceived it to be the sound of that voice which so many prophets and kings had desired to hear, and had not heard it, viz. the voice proclaiming the actual incarnation of Messiah, he breaks forth in transport, "The voice of him that crieth " in the wilderness!"

*Hark! a glad voice the lonely desert  
 cheers;*

*Prepare the way! a God, a God ap-  
 pears.*

The voice which thus sounded in the prophet's ears, so long before it was really heard upon the earth, was that  
 of



of the Baptist, who, at the proper season, was sent, to dispose the hearts and affections of men for the reception of their Saviour, when he should make his appearance. SECT. IV.

4. "EVERY valley shall be exalted,  
"and every mountain and hill  
"made low: and the crooked  
"shall be made straight, and  
"the rough places plain."

THESE are the words of the prophet himself, unfolding the counsels of God concerning the manner in which Messiah's kingdom should be established in the world, and the alterations which must necessarily take place, in order to that end. "Every valley shall be exalted;" to the poor in spirit, the lowly and contrite souls, the Gospel shall be preached, and they shall be exalted in faith and hope --- "and every mountain and hill made low;" on the contrary, pride of every kind, and in every shape, whether exalting itself in judaical pharisaism, or in gentile philosophy, against the knowlege of God, shall be made

SECT. IV. made low, and subdued to the obedience of Christ: “ and the crooked shall be “ made straight;” truth and rectitude shall succeed to error and depravity --- “ and the rough places plain;” every thing that offendeth shall be removed, and all difficulties and inequalities smoothed, till unanimity and uniformity prevail. Thus shall the way be prepared for the King of Righteousness to visit his people, to dwell in them, and to walk among them.

5. “ AND the glory of the Lord shall “ be revealed, and all flesh shall “ see it together; for the mouth “ of the Lord hath spoken it.”

IMMEDIATELY after the proclamation and preparation made by the Baptist, the Divinity was revealed in human nature, God was manifested in the flesh, seen and conversed with by all ranks and degrees of men, high and low, rich and poor, Jews and Gentiles, Pharisees and Saducees, publicans and sinners. The accomplishment of this part of *Isaiah's* prophecy is exactly related by

St.

St. *John* the Evangelist, in the follow-  
 ing terms; “The word was made flesh,  
 “and dwelt among us, and *we* beheld  
 “*his* GLORY, the glory as of the only  
 “begotten of the Father, full of grace  
 “and truth <sup>a</sup>.”

THUS we have seen under what character the Baptist is held forth to us in the predictions of the prophets concerning him, as one who should go before Messiah in the spirit and power of *Elias*, to proclaim and prepare the way for the advent of God incarnate. How perfectly, during the course of his ministry, he filled up this character, will appear in the subsequent sections.

<sup>a</sup> John i. 14.

## SECTION V.

*Considerations on the appearance, doctrine,  
and baptism of St. John.*

SECT. V.

**T**HE days of St. *John's* retirement were now ended, and he was to exchange the pleasures of contemplation for the far different scenes of an active life; to behold, with grief and indignation, the sins and follies of mankind, the sight of which must needs be more grating and afflicting to his righteous soul, than a garment of *camel's hair* could be to his body; to encounter the opposition of a world that would be sure to take arms against him, from the moment in which he stood forth a preacher of repentance and reformation. But no good could be done to others in solitude, no converts could be made in the desarts; and he must therefore quit even the most refined and exalted of intellectual enjoyments, as every minister of Christ should be ready to do, when

when charity dictates an attendance on the necessities of his fellow creatures. SECT.V.

YET let it be observed, that St. *John* was thirty years of age, when “the word of God came to him in the wilderness<sup>a</sup>,” and commissioned him to enter upon his ministry; and the holy Jesus likewise was of the same age, when inaugurated to his office, by the visible descent of the Spirit upon him at his baptism; to intimate, perhaps, that neither the exigences of mankind, nor a consciousness of abilities for the work, can be pleaded as a sufficient warrant for a man to run before he is sent, and take the sacred office upon himself, without a regular and lawful call. The institutions of God are not without a reason, and he will not be served by the breach of his commandments.

THE place to which the Baptist first repaired is styled “the wilderness of Judea<sup>b</sup>,” a country not like the vast and uninhabited *deserts* in which he was educated, but one thinly peopled, a

<sup>a</sup> Luke iii. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Matt. iii. 1. Luke iii. 3.

SECT. V. comparative wilderness, chosen by him on account of it's bordering on the river. Hither the inhabitants of the neighbouring cities and villages presently flocked in great numbers, attracted by the uncommon sanctity of the new preacher, who thus came forth, on a sudden, from the desarts, like one from another world, without any connections in this, that no attachment might take him off from the duties of his high calling, or any way impede him in the exercise of it; since a man's worst foes have often been those of his own household, and the ties of flesh and blood have been known to prevail, where tyrants have threatened and inflicted tortures, without effect. And as there is nothing so directly opposite to the profession of a prophet, nothing which so soon or so effectually sullies his reputation, as a tendency to indulgence and sensuality; in him, who was "more than a prophet<sup>a</sup>," we must expect to find a perfect crucifixion of the flesh, with it's affections and lusts. "What went ye out into the wilderness to

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xi. 9.

"see?"

“see? A man clothed in soft raiment?” No, the very reverse; a man, like his predecessor *Elijah*, coarsely attired; “his raiment of camel’s hair, with a leather girdle about his loins;” and content with the plainest food that nature could provide for him; “his meat, locusts, and wild honey<sup>b</sup>”; a man, whose person, habit, and manner of life, were themselves a sermon, and the best illustration of the doctrine he was about to teach; a proper person to prepare the way for Christ, and introduce the law to the gospel; to shew men what effect the one ought to have upon them, in order to dispose them for the blessings of the other; that mercy might save from the wrath which justice had denounced, and Jesus comfort those whom *Moses* had caused to mourn.

THE actions of a prophet, who appears, like the Baptist, with an extraordinary mission, though they are not to be imitated by us according to the letter, may yet convey a moral of general use. There is no obligation upon

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xi. 8.

<sup>b</sup> Ibid. iii. 4.

SECT. V. us to be clothed with *camel's hair*, and to eat *locusts and wild honey*, nor are we commanded to abstain wholly from *wine*, as St. *John* did, according to the prediction of the angel concerning him, delivered at the annuntiation of his birth, "He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink, and shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb<sup>a</sup>." But who doth not here perceive, evidently marked out, the opposition between sensuality and the spirit of holiness, and the impossibility of their dwelling together under the same roof? "Into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter, nor dwell in a body that is subject to sin. For the holy spirit of discipline will flee deceit, and remove from thoughts that are without understanding, and will not abide when unrighteousness cometh in<sup>b</sup>." As, therefore, "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost<sup>c</sup>," who speaks in the scriptures, who enlightens our

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 15.

<sup>b</sup> Wisd. i. 4.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 3.



understandings to interpret them, and who gives authority as well as ability to preach that great truth revealed in them, every minister of Christ, who succeeds the Baptist in the blessed work of calling men to salvation, should mortify the lusts of the flesh, that the graces of the Spirit may live and grow in him.

By a thorough mortification of the flesh, St. John had gained a compleat victory over the world, which had nothing in it that he wanted. And herein consisted that *greatness* of his character foretold by the angel; "He shall be *great* in the sight of the Lord<sup>a</sup>." Earthly pageantry engages not the attention of the spirits above, unless it be to pity such as set their hearts upon it. They discerned something more truly great in the person of the Baptist, when he came forth from the desarts, than in that of a triumphant monarch, at the head of his victorious army. "Behold," saith our Lord, "they that wear soft clothing are in kings'

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 15.

"houses<sup>a</sup>;"

SECT. V. “houses<sup>a</sup>,” look for them among the attendants upon the princes of this world, and not among my servants. They who thirst after temporal honours and advantages, must go where such things are to be had. And let them go any where, rather than come into the church, with these dispositions. For he who would persuade others to despise the world, while the love of it appears to direct and govern all his own actions, can expect no better success than it may be supposed St. Peter would have met with, had he invited those, who stood with him round the fire in the high priest’s hall, into the service of that master, whom they had just before heard him deny. “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren<sup>b</sup>.” attempt not to do it till then, lest thou not only fallest into condemnation thyself, but layest a stumbling block in the way of the weak, and causest the name of God and his gospel to be thus blasphemed through thy double-mindedness, while thy life is at variance with

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xi. 8.

<sup>b</sup> Luke xxii. 32.

thy doctrine. He who undertakes to SECT.V. reprove the world, must be one whom the world cannot reprove. All eyes will be upon him; his actions, his words, his very gestures and looks will be observed and canvassed by his sharp sighted enemies. It will therefore behove one, so exposed on all sides, to abstain from the least appearance of evil, to stand at the utmost distance from temptation, and to prevent even the possibility of a suspicion. The ax must be laid to the root, and the passions mortified, till the man become, in the emphatical language of scripture, "dead to sin<sup>a</sup>," as a corpse is to the delights and concerns of life. "The dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a portion in any thing that is done under the sun<sup>b</sup>."

STRANGE, therefore, as St. *John's* appearance and manner of life might at first seem, they were presently explained, when he began to preach a doctrine harsh and distasteful to flesh and blood, as the garment he wore, and the food

<sup>a</sup> Rom. vi. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Eccles. ix. 5, 6.

SECT. V. on which he subsisted. “ Repent ye ;”

that is, Be converted, or changed, in heart and mind, in principle and practice, from error to truth, from sin to righteousness, from the flesh to the Spirit, from the world to God ; “ for the “ kingdom of heaven is at hand <sup>a</sup> ;” a new and heavenly kingdom is about to be set up amongst you, with new and heavenly laws, under a new and heavenly king, the promised Messiah, and none but men of new and heavenly tempers and dispositions can possibly become the subjects of it. I am the person commissioned to prepare you for your happy change, by calling you to repentance, and to my baptism which is “ the baptism of repentance, for the remission “ of sins <sup>b</sup>,” through faith in him “ who “ cometh after me,” to confer pardon and forgiveness. I am the messenger foretold by *Malachi* and *Isaiab*, sent in this manner to prepare the way of him who is your King, your Lord, and your God, now ready to be revealed, as the Saviour of men. “ Repent ye, for the

<sup>a</sup> Matt. iii. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Luke iii. 3.

“ king-



“kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Thus did St. *John* lay the foundations of the evangelical edifice in mortification and self-denial; nor did his blessed Master afterward propose the glories of a crown to any but those who should be ready to take up their cross in the way to them.

THE appearance of sanctity, put on by every impostor, is a proof of the influence, which it hath, when genuine and unaffected, over the minds of men. The preacher will always be attended, who conforms to his own doctrine, and exemplifies it in his life; be that doctrine ever so rigid. No sooner was it known, that *John*, the son of *Zacharias*, was come forth from the deserts, and had begun to preach, but “there  
 “went out unto him Jerusalem, and all  
 “Judea, and all the region round about  
 “Jordan, and were baptized of him in  
 “Jordan, confessing their sins<sup>a</sup>.” The discourses of the Baptist were sharp and piercing as lancets. He applied them home to the human heart, swollen with pride, and full of iniquity. And indeed,

<sup>a</sup> Matt. iii. 5, 6.

SECT. V.

much anxiety and wretchedness might be relieved, much despair and suicide might be prevented among us of this land, if the members of our church would but follow her direction, and as often as their minds were oppressed, and they could not quiet their own consciences, go “to some discreet and “learned minister of God’s word, and “open their grief, that they might receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice.”

THE wisdom and goodness of God are seen in his manner of proportioning his aids to the exigences of his people, and raising up reformers, when religion most needs their help, to revive the true spirit of it among men. If we view the state of things in *Judea* at two different periods, we shall soon perceive how seasonably *Elijah* was sent at one time, and *John* the Baptist, that second *Elijah*, at another. Each was an aera of distinguished corruption, but corruption of a different species. During the former, idolatry was the fashionable error, which had found it’s way into the court,

court, and overspread the face of the church. The characteristics of the latter were, on the one hand, a pharisaical hypocrisy, a boast of moral rectitude, which existed only in theory, and a vain confidence in a law which nobody observed; on the other, a Sadducean infidelity, opposed to the national faith and hope, denying a resurrection, and future state of retribution. *Elijah* reclaimed the people from the worship of Baal to that of the true God; *John* called his hearers from unbelief, hypocrisy, and vice, to faith and holiness.

SECT.V.

AN ambassador of heaven, sent to preach truth to those who are captivated by error, and righteousness to those who are enamoured of sin, will never proceed far in the discharge of his trust, unless he be endued with a fervent zeal for the cause and the honour of him that sent him. Every holy person is not blessed with a spirit, any more than he is invested with a commission, to appear in a public capacity, to reprove rulers and kings, to look an angry world in the face, and overcome all the opposition it can raise against him. Zeal, with-

SECT. V. without holiness to support it, like a meteor, will blaze and expire. Zeal, without knowlege to limit and direct it, will waste and destroy, like the element from the effect of which it takes it's name, when that has burst it's bounds, and rules where it ought to be in subjection. But when knowlege and holiness are first obtained, it is zeal which must quicken and diffuse them, as the sun doth light and heat, for the benefit of the universe. "Then stood up Elias the prophet as fire," saith the son of *Sirach*, "and his word burnt like a lamp<sup>a</sup>." And our Lord, speaking of the Baptist, gives this account of him, "He was a burning and a shining light<sup>b</sup>." His zeal was tempered with knowlege, for it gave *light*; and his knowlege was actuated by zeal, for it was *burning* as well as *shining*. His sermons came warm from the heart of the speaker, and therefore found their way to that of the hearer, which was inflamed by them with the love, as

<sup>a</sup> Eccles. xlviii. 12.

<sup>b</sup> John v. 35.



his understanding was enlightened with the knowlege of heavenly things. SECT.V.

LET us view and compare together the zeal of *Elijah*, exerted before idolatrous *Israel* assembled at mount *Carmel*, and that displayed by St. *John*, when he saw the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism.

FOR the sins of the people, and the iniquities of the prince, in the days of *Elijah*<sup>a</sup>, heaven was closed over their heads, the blessings of rain and dew were withheld till the divine author of them should be again acknowledged, and famine stalked through the land, preaching repentance as she went. *Israel* felt the wound, but owned not the hand that inflicted it. The Almighty had constituted the prophet his vicegerent, and enjoined the elements to second him in the work of reformation. *Ahab* and his subjects, instead of consulting *Elijah* about the removal of their calamities, regarded him as the occasion of them, and the sole "troublers of *Israel*." At the command of God, he presents himself before the king, and tells him

<sup>a</sup> See 1 Kings xvii, & xviii.

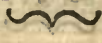
plainly

## SECT. V.

plainly, "Thou art the man." *Israel* is convened at mount *Carmel*, and reproved. "Why halt ye between two opinions? "If Jehovah be God, follow him. But "if Baal, then follow him." The false prophets appear on the side of Baal and his kindred idols, to the number of nine hundred and fifty: on the side of the true God, *Elijah* stands single. The trial is made, and the grand question determined by a visible token of the divine presence. The nation returns to it's duty, idolatry is punished in it's votaries, the heaven gives rain, and the earth brings forth her increase.

ON the banks of *Jordan* we behold, in the person of St. *John*<sup>a</sup>, another *Elijah*, reproofing the people of *Israel*, again departed from the Lord their God, while some, as the Pharisees, were hypocrites, and others, as the Sadducees, were unbelievers. Equally a stranger to fear and partiality, and endued with a prophetic power of discerning that serpentine subtlety and malignity which lurked under a specious outside, he rebukes them sharply, if by

<sup>a</sup> See Matt. iii. 7, &c.



any means he might convince them of sin, and lead them to true repentance.

“ O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come ? ” You, who seem to have taken possession of the inheritance, as if Messiah would never appear to claim it ; you, who trust in yourselves that you are righteous, and despise others ; come you to me, to be baptized with publicans and sinners ? What can be the reason of all this ? What can be your motive ? The business in hand is not one to be trifled with. Hypocrisy has no place here ; nor will the external shew, without the internal work, in this case, avail to any thing, but condemnation. “ Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance : ” be not barren, but “ bring forth ; ” bring forth not leaves only, or fair professions, promises, and designs, but “ fruits, ” or good deeds ; and such as may be “ worthy ” of the tree on which they grow ; such as may advance to maturity, and ripen into holiness. “ And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father : ” many will

M here-

SECT. V. hereafter say that, to little purpose. A descent from the loins of *Abraham* will profit none, but those who are like *Abraham*. His true children are reckoned by faith, not consanguinity. Imagine not that the favour of heaven is hereditary and indefeasible in the line of *Abraham* according to the flesh, or that the divine promises must fail, if not made good to you; “for I say unto you, that  
 “God is able of these stones to raise up  
 “children unto Abraham;” by the power of his grace he can make converts of nations at present utterly barren, unfruitful, obdurate, who shall inherit the blessing which you reject. Nor let the consideration, that Messiah has so long delayed his coming, induce you to be careless and negligent: “for now  
 “is the ax laid to the root of the tree:” believe me, he is at hand; your trial will soon be over, and your fate determined; the decisive and irremediable stroke will be struck, if not prevented by a timely repentance, a speedy and real change of heart and manners; “every tree which bringeth not forth  
 “good fruit shall be cut down and cast  
 “into

“into the fire.” Hitherto God hath SECT.V.  
born with your errors and iniquities,  
but he will do so no longer. The law  
hath been given, and the prophets have  
been sent; but they are not regarded;  
and therefore he is coming, after whom  
no other messenger is to be expected  
from above. He will be the Saviour of  
all, who, from a sense of their sins,  
shall be ready to embrace him as such.  
I am not that person, but the least and  
lowest of his servants, sent before to  
give notice of his approach, and pre-  
pare you to receive him. “I indeed  
“baptize you with water unto repent-  
“ance;” but it is he who must grant  
remission of sins repented of; “he that  
“cometh after me is mightier than I,  
“whose shoes I am not worthy to bear;”  
he brings with him almighty power  
from on high, to pardon sins, and con-  
fer grace; “he shall baptize you with  
“the Holy Ghost and with fire,” to  
sanctify your natures, to purify, en-  
lighten, and inflame your hearts with  
the desire and love of celestial objects.  
At his appearance, he will try and make  
manifest the tempers and dispositions of

SECT. V. men. Deceit and hypocrisy shall not stand before him. “His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor,” sifting and winnowing that which is good from that which seems to be so; “and he will gather his wheat into his garner,” translate to heaven all that is pure, substantial, and fruitful; “but he will burn up the chaff,” whatsoever is fallacious, light, empty, and barren, “with unquenchable fire,” in hell.

SUCH a discourse from such a person occasioned great searchings in the hearts of the people. They found all the vain opinions and presumptions, on which they had been accustomed to rely, suddenly taken from them, and nothing left, but to put themselves forthwith under the direction of so holy and heavenly a preacher. With fear and trembling they applied to him, as the affrighted gaoler afterwards did to *Paul* and *Silas*, saying, “What shall we do then?” And when a penitent will ask advice of his spiritual guide, with a determined resolution to follow it, he

Luke iii. 10, &c.

is not far from the kingdom of God. SECT. V.  
 He is sensible of his disease; and that, in the maladies of the mind, is half the cure. St. *John*, in his answer, enjoins not legal, but evangelical sacrifices, exhorting his converts to shew the sincerity of their conversion by loving their neighbours, and relieving their necessities, as God had loved and relieved them. “He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat let him do likewise.” These works of feeding and clothing the poor, including all other acts of mercy under them, are mentioned, as being the most necessary and indispensable; and he, says a pious writer upon this passage, who is not moved with his brother’s misery, deserves to find God unmoved with his own.

AMONG others that came to be baptized, were some *publicans*, or tax-gatherers; a set of men, whose employment rendered them odious, as it often tempted them to court the favour of those who employed them, or to gratify their own avarice, by fleecing the people.

SECT. V. people. These also were importunate with St. *John*, saying, “And what shall we do?” And he said unto them, “Exact no more than that which is appointed you.” The reflections of the writer above-cited, upon this case of the publicans, and the following one of the *soldiers*, are so extremely sensible, judicious, and pertinent, that the reader will have an obligation to me, for presenting him with them, nearly as I find them. “A wise preacher, like St. *John*, should distinguish the abuses of any state or condition of life from the condition itself; he should be so far from disturbing either the peace of private consciences, or the public repose, by condemning necessary employments, that he ought carefully to promote both, by contenting himself with only retrenching the disorders and injustice of those who exercise them. To be exact in not permitting any abuses in employments of this nature, is to serve the state: and those loose casuists, who allow and authorize them, are pernicious to governments, by rendering these employments odious to the people,

by



by favouring their murmurings, by encouraging acts of injustice, and thereby giving occasion to rebellion and revolt.

“ And the soldiers demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.” St.

*John* here, in the last place, regulates the duties of military persons, and shews, that no condition is excluded from salvation. The business of war is not in itself at all opposite thereto; since there have been not only christian *soldiers*, but even great saints and generous martyrs of that profession. If all war was contrary to the gospel, St. *John* would not have allowed those who presented themselves before him to continue in that state. However it is certainly full of obstacles to salvation, which very few surmount. A state, which is generally embraced either out of passion, or libertinism, or through a blind destination of birth, the exercises whereof are so violent and tumultuous, agrees but little with the exercises of christianity, or the spirit of the gospel, which is all peace,

## SECT. V.

peace, charity, and meekness. It is notwithstanding just and necessary, that there should be men to defend the state; but it is still more just and necessary, that this should not be done at the expence of salvation. The grace of God can do every thing: this is what ought to comfort those who intend to serve *him* in serving their king and country."

ONE cannot but observe the general agreement and harmony which seem to have prevailed, at this time among men otherwise of tempers and dispositions very different from, and opposite to each other. Jews and Gentiles, Pharisees and Publicans, Sadducees and Soldiers, all confess their sins, and participate of the same baptism, all struck with apprehensions of some impending evil, all flying from the wrath to come, forgetting their mutual hostilities and antipathies, and, like the creatures in the days of *Noah*, taking refuge together in the ark. As if the prophecy of *Isaiab* had now begun to receive it's accomplishment, the publicans, who, before the preaching of *John*, were ravenous as evening "wolves," became as innocent

nocent as the “lamb.” The soldiers, SECT.V. who had been formerly fierce and cruel as the “lion,” became tame and tractable as the “ox,” and submitted their necks to the yoke of the gospel. Such of the Pharisees likewise, who, before their baptism, had been venomous as the “asp,” or “cockatrice,” did; by the worthy receiving of this baptism, and the grace which God gave them, become mild and gentle as the “sucking infant,” or “weaned child.”

THE concord thus produced in *Ju-  
dea* by the sermons of St. *John*, and the tranquillity which the whole earth then enjoyed, sitting quiet as it were in expectation of her Lord, betokened the manifestation of the Prince of peace. “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan to John, to be baptized of him.” After thirty years past in retirement at *Nazareth*, the blessed Jesus was now to break forth, like the sun from a cloud, or a stream from the bowels of the earth, to enlighten man-

<sup>a</sup> See the Works of Dr Thomas Jackson, ii. 522.

<sup>b</sup> Matt. iii. 13, &c.

SECT. V. kind by his doctrine, and refresh them with the influences of his grace. The mighty concourse of all ranks and degrees of people attending St. *John* at the river *Jordan*, rendered that the fittest place where he might first shew himself to the world. He who knew no sin, but was to take away the sins of all other men, presented himself in the crowd of sinners, as one of them, and solicited “the baptism of repentance,” not that water might sanctify him, but that he might “sanctify water to the “mystical washing away of sin.”

CONFUNDED at the thought of the Master being baptized by the servant, St. *John* at first “forbad him, saying, I “have need to be baptized of thee, and “comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be “so now, for thus it becometh us to “fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.” Jesus Christ, as condescending to stand charged with our sins, and, to that end, being “made “under the law<sup>a</sup>,” was to fulfil the “righteousness” of the law, as it con-

Gal. iv. 4.   
 fisted

sisted in an obedience to ceremonial rites, as well as moral precepts. In the character and capacity of our substitute, he underwent circumcision, although he had no sin of his own to be cut off; and received baptism, although he had no pollution of his own to be washed away. What Christian can slight the ordinances of the church, when he sees the Redeemer, for his sake, submitting to observe them all?

No sooner was Jesus baptized, but he “came up straightway” out of the river, like another *Joshua*, leading his people, through the waters of *Jordan*, to the land of promise. And as he was “praying,” doubtless for success in the great work he had undertaken, “Lo, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God,” encompassed, we may presume, with a blaze of glory, “descended in a bodily shape like a dove,” speaking better things than that of *Noah*. In this form, emblematical of innocence and purity, it “lighted,” settled, and abode upon him, the Father thus consecrating him to his office, by “anointing him with the Holy Ghost

SECT. V. “and with power<sup>a</sup>,” as the legal ministers were anointed with oil. And that no doubt might remain, the appearance was farther explained by “a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Such are the blessings which, in effect, do always attend the divine sacraments, when duly administered, with prayer. For then the heavens are opened, and the Spirit is given, to conform us to the image of a meek and holy Saviour, and, through him, to make us acceptable in the sight of God.

<sup>a</sup> Acts x. 38.

SECTION VI.

*Considerations on the testimony born by St. John, at different times, to the Messiahship of Jesus.*

WHEN a servant of God, through SECT. VI.  
the power of divine grace, hath  
made some proficiency in holiness, and  
seth the world and the flesh under his  
feet, it is not uncommon for his third  
grand enemy, the devil, to set upon  
him, and prevail over him, by puffing  
him up with a conceit of his own ex-  
cellency, and so rendering his very at-  
tainments an occasion of his falling.  
The hurt which a man receives, in such  
a case, is proportionable to the height  
from which he falls; as hell was first  
prepared for the tempter himself, be-  
cause he fell from heaven.

IT is not, therefore, the least con-  
spicuous part of St. John's character,  
that a sanctity so extraordinary was not  
in him accompanied with any degree of  
pride,

SECT. VI. pride, a worm which often cankers the fairest fruits that grow in the garden of God. He heard his own praise echoed from every quarter, and “all men,” struck with admiration at what was about to happen, “mused in their hearts concerning him, whether he was the Christ<sup>a</sup>.” Nay, the Sanhedrim, that they might be resolved in so important a point, sent a formal deputation of “priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to enquire of him, Who art thou<sup>b</sup>.” As the Baptist was, at that time, in high repute among his countrymen, and as secular designs are sometimes covered with spiritual pretences, it is not impossible, but that they might hope to flatter him into an acknowledgment of his being “some great one,” and to frame of him a Messiah adapted to their purposes. But *John* was neither ambitious of an honour which did not belong to him, nor ashamed of a Master, who was about to appear in the form of a servant. He took no glory to himself, but remitted it all where he

<sup>a</sup> Luke iii. 15.

<sup>b</sup> John i. 19, &c.



knew it to be due. “He confessed, and SECT. VI.  
 “denied not, but confessed, I am not  
 “the Christ. And they asked him,  
 “What then? Art thou Elias,” that is,  
*Elijah the Tishbite*, whom they expected  
 to descend from heaven? “And he  
 “saith, I am not. Art thou ο *προφητης*,  
 “*the prophet*,” meaning probably “Je-  
 “remias, or one of the prophets,”  
 whom, as it appears by Matt. xvi. 14.  
 the Jews looked for to arise from the  
 dead. “And he answered, No.”

To all these enquiries, made by the  
 priests and Levites deputed from the  
 Sanhedrim, St. *John* returned answers  
 which were true, but concise as pos-  
 sible, that they might take no advan-  
 tage of his words, being aware that  
 they grew envious of his fame, jealous  
 for their own authority, and fearful of  
 a Messiah, who would not answer their  
 hopes, by gratifying their avarice and  
 ambition. “Then said they to him,  
 “Who art thou, that we may give an  
 “answer to them that sent us? What  
 “sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am  
 “the voice of one crying in the wilder-  
 “ness, Make straight the way of the  
 “Lord,

SECT. VI. "Lord, as said the prophet Esaias."

~ This was informing them plainly enough, that the prophecies were soon to be accomplished by the manifestation of Messiah, and that repentance, according to his doctrine and baptism, was the only preparation fit and necessary to be made, for the reception of their King.

"They who were sent were of the "Pharisees," and consequently could not relish tidings which put an end to all their schemes of temporal dominion, and earthly grandeur, inculcating, instead of them, the duties of mortification and self-denial. This was not *their* system; and many, in every age since, have been of the same opinion, not caring to receive Christ, unless he came to them with the world in his hand. Finding, therefore, that *John* had no vanity to be worked upon, they had recourse to other measures, and began to dispute his commission to baptize; "They asked him, and said unto him, "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be "not that Christ, nor Elias, neither "that prophet?"

St.

St. *John's* reply shews his own hum-  
mility, and, at the same time, bears tes-  
timony to the dignity of Jesus. "I in-  
" deed baptize you with water;" my  
baptism, like my preaching, is prepa-  
ratory only, leading to another baptism  
of the Spirit, which shall cleanse the  
souls of penitents from every thing that  
defileth, through faith in Messiah and his  
heavenly doctrine. And this Messiah is not  
afar off, as you may imagine him to be;  
"there standeth one among you, whom  
" ye know not;" he appears like other  
men, lowly, unattended, undistinguish-  
ed; he doth not, as yet, think proper  
to manifest his power and glory; but  
hereafter you will find him to be far  
other than he seems. As to myself, of  
whom some are pleased to entertain an  
high opinion, I am nothing: "This is  
" he, who, coming after me, is pre-  
" ferred before me," as much as the  
greatest master is before the meanest of  
his servants, deemed unworthy to per-  
form the least office about his person;  
"the latchet of whose shoes I am not  
" worthy to unloose." This testimony  
did St. *John* give to the Saviour of the  
O world,

SECT. VI. world, in the audience of the priests, and Levites, and the people, “at Bethabara beyond Jordan, where he was baptizing.” Intent upon humbling himself, that his great Lord and Master might be exalted, he declared himself a messenger only, sent to prepare his ways; and every thing in him, and about him, spoke the same language.

“THE next day,” an opportunity offered itself of pointing out the person of Jesus to the people; “John seeth Jesus coming unto him,” probably, to acknowledge him as his friend, relation, and precursor; “and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world:” Behold that blessed person prefigured in the law, and foretold by the prophets; one that is all meekness and innocence, patience and resignation, without offence in his mouth, without guile or malice in his heart, without spot or blemish in soul or body; the Lamb which *Abraham* told his son *Isaac*, that God would in time provide; the Lamb, by the sprinkling of whose blood, true *Israelites* are preserved from the destroyer; the sacrifice



crifice on which are laid the iniquities of us all; the Saviour who, by expiating, taketh away the sin of the world, and conferreth righteousness on them that will believe in him, and accept it from him, being conformed to his example of meekness and lowliness. This, O all ye that behold him, “this is he “of whom I said, after me cometh “a man which is preferred before me, “for he was,” he existed, ages “before “me,” even from the beginning; he is fairer than the children of men, full of grace and truth, of divine glory, and celestial beauty.

To guard against any suspicion of collusion<sup>a</sup> between two persons, who, as relations, might be supposed to act in concert, and favour each other's pretensions, St. *John* adds, “And I knew “him not, but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto “me, Upon whom thou shalt see the “Spirit descending and remaining on

<sup>a</sup> See the impossibility of any such collusion fully demonstrated by the Reverend Mr. *Bell*, in his exact and elaborate *Enquiry into the Divine Missions of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ*.

SECT. VI. “him, the same is he which baptizeth  
 with the Holy Ghost.”

FROM this passage we learn, that the visible descent of the Spirit was the sign given to St. *John*, whereby he was to know the Messiah. Jesus was brought up at *Nazareth*; and St. *John* was educated in the desarts; and it seems to have been so ordered by Providence, that no interview had passed between them, after they had arrived to years of maturity. When Jesus, therefore, came to be baptized, St. *John* had no knowledge of his person. But, probably, on making the enquiries, usual at baptism, into his profession, name, and place of abode, and finding likewise, that he had no sins to confess<sup>a</sup>, as all others had, he saw reason sufficient to conclude, that this was the Christ; which might occasion his apology, “I have need to be baptized of thee,” &c. And then, when Jesus came up out of the water, the Spirit descended, and put the matter beyond all doubt. “I saw, and bare

<sup>a</sup> See *Annotations on St. John's Gospel*, by the Rev. Mr. Merrick, Part II. p. 50. and the Works of Dr. Jackson, by him referred to, Vol. II. p. 518.

“ record,

“ record, that this is the Son of God.” SECT. VI.

So little account did these two wonderful personages make of their relation according to the flesh. From their infancy they had not conversed together; and when they met, it was in public, that *John* might bear his testimony; soon after which, he was cast into prison, and saw Jesus no more. An higher, more important, and durable connection, than any formed by consanguinity, engaged his attention, as it should do that of all Christ's disciples, according to those deep and divine strains of *St. Paul*; “ The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh, yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things

SECT. VI. "things are past away; behold, all  
 "things are become new<sup>a</sup>."

THE Baptist, having now lived to see the Lord's Christ, and shew him to the world, was ready, like old *Simeon*, to depart in peace, and to make over his disciples to a better Master, who would never leave them, nor forsake them. "Again, the next day after, "John stood, and two of his disciples; "and looking upon Jesus as he walked, "he saith, Behold the Lamb of God." Happy the Christian minister, who, like *St. John*, lives only to point out the Saviour to his people. And happy the people, who, like the two disciples, thereupon follow Jesus, enquire where he dwelleth, enter in, and abide with him.

To one of *St. John's* disposition it could not but be matter of concern to find envy and jealousy stirring in the breasts of his disciples, on account of the increasing fame of Jesus, as being likely to eclipse that of their master. For on occasion of a dispute which had happened about purification by baptism

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. v. 14.



(disputes being seldom managed so as SECT. VI. not to produce ill-will) “they came  
 “unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi,  
 “he that was with thee beyond Jordan,  
 “to whom thou bearest witness, be-  
 “hold, the same baptizeth, and all  
 “men come unto him<sup>a</sup> ;” intimating,  
 that *John* was in danger of losing both  
 his credit and his disciples, by means  
 of one, whom they took for a disciple,  
 like themselves, as he had been baptiz-  
 ed by the same master. So ready are  
 men, at every turn, to form parties in  
 religion, and to set up their respective  
 teachers in opposition to each other ;  
 the consequences of which are, that  
 the hearers waste that time in wrang-  
 ling about a duty, which should be  
 spent in practising it ; and the teachers,  
 if they have not good hearts and steady  
 heads, preach themselves, instead of  
 preaching Jesus Christ. “All men come  
 “to him !” Great hath been the power  
 of this argument to kindle the flames of  
 emulation and dissention in the church ;  
 and the disciples of *John* did not doubt  
 but that the consideration would excite

<sup>a</sup> John iii. 26, &c.

SECT. VI. in him those passions, which they felt working within themselves.

BUT he was not framed of materials liable to take fire from such a spark. On the contrary, a perusal of the discourse which this address procured from him, is enough at any time to extinguish it, where it may have fallen. He made use of the incident, to bear his last and most noble testimony to the power and majesty of his Lord. So far was he from being offended, or chagrined, because all men resorted to Jesus, that he triumphed in it, as his glory and his joy, as the very end for which he was sent into the world, to preach and to baptize. As if he had said ---

WHY are ye jealous, and why do envious thoughts arise in your hearts? Look not to me, or to any thing that is in me, but to God, who made me what I am, placed me in the station, and called me to the office designed for me; "a man can receive," or take to himself, "nothing, except it be given him "from above." And ye know the character in which I have ever acted; "Ye "yourselves bear me witness, that I "said,

“ said, I am not the Christ, but that I SECT. VI.  
“ am sent before him,” as his messenger and minister, not to assemble disciples in mine own name, but to prepare men for him, and direct men to him. If therefore ye set so much by my authority, why do ye not credit my testimony? To Messiah, not to me, the church is to be gathered and united; and “ he  
“ that hath the bride is the bridegroom:  
“ but the friend of the bridegroom,” who hath been honoured with a share in bringing about so happy an event, and who, when it is brought about, “ standeth and heareth him” conversing with his spouse, cannot therefore be grieved and vexed; he cannot envy the felicity of the bridegroom, or desire to take the bride from him; but most assuredly congratulates with him, and “ rejoiceth greatly because of the bride-  
“ groom’s voice,” finding that he hath so well succeeded in the work in which he was employed. This is my very case, when you come and tell me, that all men resort to the person, of whom I have so often testified, that he is the Christ; “ this my joy therefore is ful-

SECT. VI.

“filled.” I have no greater pleasure than to hear, that disciples go from me to him. As the morning star, I only shone to proclaim the approach of the sun. Now he is risen, I go down; “he must increase, but I must decrease;” he will shine more and more unto the perfect day, while I shall set, and disappear. And reason good why it should be so. That which is preparatory must give place to that which is perfective; a baptism of water must yield to a baptism of fire; an human instructor must cede to one that is divine. “He that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth;” in spite of his best endeavours, he will favour of his original, and there will be an alloy of dust and ashes in all he saith; whereas “he that cometh from heaven,” I mean the blessed person of whom ye are so jealous, “is above all” the children of *Adam*. When this sun shineth in his strength, every star is obscured, and the world will perceive the difference between the discourses of the Master and those of the servant, as readily as it distinguisheth the glories of the day from the

the pale lustre and faint glimmering of those orbs, which serve in some measure to dispel the darkness of the night, According to the grace given unto me, I have declared the kingdom of heaven to be at hand; but when Messiah speaks of that kingdom, he speaks from his own knowlege; "what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth;" and yet, though I have said so much of him, and so many go to hear him, "no man receiveth his testimony," as he ought to do. Think not this a slight matter, for no one can disbelieve him, without giving God the lie; "he that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal, that God is true," by allowing the credentials of his Son, and acknowledging in him the accomplishment of what was foretold by the law, by the prophets, and by myself. "For he," the Messiah, "whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God," and that in a different sense from all others, who, from time to time, have been endued with such a portion of the divine influence as was meet for them; but "God giveth not the Spirit by

SECT. VI. *“measure unto him,”* having decreed, that in him should all fulness dwell. *“For the Father loveth the Son,”* not as he loveth any of his faithful servants, but so as that *“he hath put all things into his hand,”* dispensing glory, honour, and immortality to mankind, through him alone. Be no longer envious and jealous, then, of his greatness, which is your salvation. If you would honour me, and at the same time serve your own eternal interest, receive, in few words, the sum and substance of this my last testimony ---- *“He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”*

By this part of St. *John’s* character and conduct, in how pleasing a manner are the ministers of Christ instructed, that they are to bear testimony to him, not to themselves; to seek his glory, not their own; that they should take pleasure in the success of their brethren’s labours, by which the cause of their common Master is promoted; that

the

the rising lights of the church should SECT. VI.  
do honour to those who have gone be-  
fore them, and the setting ones rejoice  
to be outshone by those who are coming  
after them; that envy and jealousy, in  
short, ought to have no place among  
the disciples of the Lamb of God, on  
whom descended and abode the celestial  
Dove.

vous and labors these, of his time  
nals, which is your salvation. If you  
weight but me, that in the same time  
leaves you own eternal himself, receive,  
in answer to the third and substance  
of this my last testimony. He  
checked without the son, hath ever  
of falling forward and that believe  
of non the son, shall not be life; but  
of this is the substance of him;  
It is this substance that's character  
and conduct, in his teaching a manner  
are the miracles which will intrude,  
that they are to be a testimony to him,  
not to themselves, or to seek his glory,  
not their own; therefore should take  
pleasure in the success of their peo-  
ple's labors, by which the cause of  
our common Master is promoted; that

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## SECTION VII.

*Considerations on the imprisonment of St. John, the message sent by him to Christ, and the answer returned to it.*

Sect. VII.

**A**DMIRABLE is the advice of the son of *Sirach* to every one who is about to stand forth in the cause of true religion. “ My son, if thou come  
 “ to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul  
 “ for temptation. Set thy heart aright,  
 “ and constantly endure, and make not  
 “ haste in time of trouble. Whatso-  
 “ ever is brought upon thee take cheer-  
 “ fully, and be patient when thou art  
 “ changed to a low estate. For gold is  
 “ tried in the fire, and acceptable men  
 “ in the furnace of adversity <sup>a</sup>.” The reformer will proceed but a little way in his work, whose zeal is not backed with fortitude. The apprehension of danger, or even the frown of power,

<sup>a</sup> Eccles. ii. 1.



will alter his sentiments; he will see Sect. VII.  
 things in a different point of view, and  
 turn with every blast of fashion or in-  
 terest, till he himself believes every  
 thing, and his hearers, offended and  
 confounded, believe nothing.

NOT so the Baptist. "What went ye  
 "out into the wilderness to see? A reed  
 "shaken with the wind?" No: a co-  
 lumn firm and immoveable, against  
 which winds might blow, and waves  
 beat, in vain; one who had fixed his  
 principles, and considered well, before  
 he entered upon action; one who be-  
 gan not to build, till he had first count-  
 ed the costs; but who, when once he  
 did begin, would be sure to finish.

A PERSON unacquainted with the  
 world, and the tempers of it's child-  
 ren, might, perhaps, be surprized upon  
 hearing, that a prophet, like St. *John*,  
 who spent his time in calling his fellow  
 creatures to happiness and salvation, and  
 who coveted no man's gold, or silver,  
 or apparel, was cast into prison. But,  
 as the wise man observeth, "The thing  
 "which hath been is that which shall

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xi. 7.

" be,


Sect. VII. “be, and there is nothing new under  
 “the sun<sup>a</sup>.” *Abab*, at the instigation  
 of *Jezebel*, again thirsts after the blood  
 of *Elijah*.

HEROD, the tetrarch of *Galilee*, had  
 put away his own wife, the daughter  
 of *Aretas*, and had married *Herodias*,  
 the wife of his brother *Philip*, whom,  
 contrary to the laws of hospitality as  
 well as religion, he had seduced, while  
 a guest in her husband’s house<sup>b</sup>. The  
 sanctity and integrity of the Baptist had  
 begotten, even in *Herod*, a great veneration  
 and reverence for his character.  
 “Herod feared John, knowing that he  
 “was a just man, and an holy, and ob-  
 “served him, and when he heard him,  
 “he did many things, and heard him  
 “gladly<sup>c</sup>.” But the matter of *Herodias*  
 was a tender point, on which the te-  
 trarch was not disposed to hear the law,  
 because he was not disposed to do it.  
 He was determined to persevere in what  
 was wrong, and his monitor to persist  
 in telling him of it, without reserve.

<sup>a</sup> Eccles. i. 9.

<sup>b</sup> See *Josephus* --- Antiq. Lib. xviii. Cap. 6.

<sup>c</sup> Mark vi. 20.

“ John said unto him, It is not lawful Sect. VII.  
 “ for thee to have thy brother’s wife.” 

*John*, who had overcome the world, could not, either by promises or threatenings, be induced to recede from his duty, through hope of temporal good, or fear of temporal evil. He was therefore soon convinced, by being carried to prison, that *Herod* had no farther occasion for his service. And who doth not rather wish to have been imprisoned with him, than to have glittered in all the glories of the throne of *Herod*? Happy *John*, sequestered once more from a troublesome world, to converse with God, and to meditate on that blessed place, and that blessed company, to which he was now hastening!

In this situation we find the thoughts of the Baptist employed not upon his own sufferings, but upon the interests of his great Master, the fame of whose miracles had reached the prison, and sounded in his ears. “ When John had  
 “ heard in prison the works of Jesus,  
 “ he sent two of his disciples<sup>a</sup> ---”  
 Thus the afflictions and tribulations

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xi. 2, &c.

Q

which

SECT. VII. which a Christian must endure for a little season, in the world, should serve only to quicken his desires after his Redeemer, of whose works, wrought in mercy for the children of men, he will often hear; and the contemplation of them should afford him continual delight in the time of his captivity, until the day of his enlargement shall come. With *Paul* and *Silas* let him declare the glad tidings of salvation, and sing the praises of God in the prison-house. Let him enquire diligently, and take every opportunity of hearing more particulars concerning his Saviour, as also of placing others in the way of information. So will he copy the example of him, who, "when he heard in prison the works of Jesus, sent two of his disciples," that they might be more fully instructed, as to his person and mission.

FOR that this must have been *St. John's* intention in sending them, is plain from the question which they were enjoined to ask; "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" The Baptist could not propose

pose this question for his own information, but evidently for that of his disciples, whose prejudices in favour of himself, their first master, he found it so difficult to conquer. What he had hitherto said having proved insufficient for that purpose, he now, in compassion to their infirmity, condescendeth to have their scruples propounded in his own name; affording us thereby a very useful hint, that in order to instruct others, we should abase ourselves, and know how to become weak with those who are so. For it often happens, that men need information upon some important point, who either thro' pride or bashfulness will not ask it, or through passion and prejudice will not receive it at our hands. In this case, the good, which we cannot do directly, we must contrive, if we can, to do indirectly, by proposing those questions ourselves, which we know that others in company want to hear answered, but cannot bring themselves to ask. This method of edifying the weak, without exposing their infirmities, will produce in them that love and confidence to-

SECT. VII. wards us, which, for their own sakes, we wish them to have. Whereas a contrary conduct, by provoking and alienating their affections from us, may put it out of our power ever to be of service to them again.

THE same charitable plan is carried on by our Lord, who, in his answer, instructs the disciples, by seeming to instruct their master; "Go (saith he) and tell *John* what ye have seen and heard." And this may suggest a reason, why Christians in general should converse more upon religious subjects, than they are wont to do, both asking questions, like *St. John*, and returning answers, like *Christ*, for the benefit and improvement of the by-standers, who may need information, through the person to whom one immediately addresseth oneself, should not. And many a man hath been the better, all his life after, for a seasonable word spoken in common conversation, which is often more regarded and attended to, than a formal discourse from the pulpit.

THE

Only

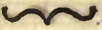
THE best proofs of a divine mission, Sect. VII.  
which man is capable of receiving, are  
miracles, evidently and incontestably  
such; miracles, of the reality of which  
the outward senses, the eyes and the  
ears, are competent judges; miracles  
brought publickly in the face of the  
world, in the presence of enemies as  
well as friends; and that, not once, or  
(twice, but repeatedly; and these mi-  
racles expressly predicted, hundreds of  
years beforehand. Such were the proofs  
brought by Christ to the disciples of  
*John*. For “in that same hour,” while  
they were present, and before their eyes,  
“he cured many of their infirmities and  
“plagues, and of evil spirits, and unto  
“many that were blind he gave sight.  
“Then said he unto them, Go your  
“way, and tell John what things ye  
“have seen and heard; how that the  
“blind see, the lame walk, the lepers  
“are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead  
“are raised, to the poor the gospel is  
“preached. And blessed is he who-  
“ever shall not be offended in me.” As  
if he had said; I bear not witness of  
myself; my miracles bear witness of me.

Only

sect. VII. Only tell *John* what you have heard and seen, and he will teach you how to draw the proper inference. *Isaiab*, as he well knoweth, did foretell, that when *Messiah* came, he would perform such and such mighty works. You yourselves are eye and ear witnesses of the works done by me. Lay the premises fairly together, and you cannot be to seek for the conclusion.

*JOHN* had engaged his reputation as a prophet, that *Jesus of Nazareth*, whom he baptized in *Jordan*, would answer the character of *Messiah*, and do the works predicted of him; as appears from *John* x. 39. where we read, that *Jesus*, having escaped from the *Jews*, “went again beyond *Jordan*, “unto the place where *John* at first “baptized; and there he abode. And “many resorted unto him, and said, “*John* did no miracle: but all things “that *John* spake of this man were “true. And many believed on him “there.” Malice itself cannot find reason to suspect a collusion, when prophecies and miracles thus unite their testi-



testimony, and proclaim Jesus to be the Sect. VII.  
Messiah. 

AT his word, “the eyes of the blind  
“were opened, and the ears of the deaf  
“unstopped; the lame man leaped as  
“an hart, and the tongue of the dumb  
“did sing<sup>a</sup>;” the leprosy, that foul,  
contagious, and obstinate disease, for  
which so many ceremonies of purifica-  
tion were appointed by the law, was  
healed at once; and the dead in their  
graves, hearing the voice of the son of  
man, came forth. Every malady and  
infirmity, to which the children of  
*Adam* were subject, vanished at his pre-  
sence, and confessed the almighty deli-  
verer of his people. This, therefore,  
is “He that should come,” nor let us  
think of “looking for another,” to  
open the eyes of the understanding, and  
let in the light of heavenly knowlege  
upon ignorant and benighted minds;  
to remove all obstructions, formed by  
interest, prejudice, or passion, and give  
us the hearing ear; to restore and invi-  
gorate the will and affections, that we  
may make large advances in the course

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<sup>a</sup> Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

of

SECT. VII. of duty, and run with delight the way  
 of God's commandments; to loose the  
 tongues which guilt hath tied, and  
 tune them to hymns of praise and thank-  
 giving; to cleanse us, by his blood,  
 from all sin, that leprosy which exclu-  
 deth from the congregation of *Israel*,  
 the camp of the saints, and the beloved  
 city; to raise our souls from death to  
 life, and our bodies from dust to glory.

“ We have found him of whom Moses  
 “ in the law, and the prophets did  
 “ write --- Rabbi, thou art the Son of  
 “ God, thou art the King of *Israel* !”

THERE is one particular in this an-  
 swer of Christ, which remaineth yet  
 unnoticed; “ The poor have the gospel  
 “ preached unto them.” Our Lord here  
 referreth to the celebrated passage in  
*Isaiah*, which, in the synagogue of  
*Nazareth*, he had expounded, and de-  
 clared to be fulfilled in himself. “ The  
 “ Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
 “ because he hath anointed me to preach  
 “ good tidings,” or the Gospel, “ to  
 “ the meek,” or poor; “ he hath sent  
 “ me to proclaim liberty to the captives,

<sup>b</sup> John i. 45, 49.

“--- to comfort all that mourn, to give Sect. VII.  
 “them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy  
 “for mourning<sup>a</sup>,” &c. The meaning  
 of all the figurative expressions here  
 used by the prophet, is this; that Mes-  
 siah should, at his appearance, confer  
 upon such as were disposed to receive  
 them, the two great evangelical bles-  
 sings, viz. remission of sins, and a par-  
 ticipation of the Spirit of joy and glad-  
 ness, with which God had “anointed  
 “him above his fellows.” The inau-  
 guration of Jesus to all the offices of the  
 Messiah, by this divine unction, *John*  
 had beheld, when, after his baptism,  
 he saw the Holy Ghost descending upon  
 him, and thereby knew him to be that  
 “Rod,” or “Branch of Jesse,” on whom  
*Isaiah* had elsewhere foretold, that “the  
 “Spirit of the Lord should rest<sup>b</sup>.”  
 Nothing therefore could be more appo-  
 site, than this part of Christ’s answer,  
 “The poor have the Gospel preached  
 “unto them;” the full import of which,  
 considered as referring to the LXI<sup>st</sup> chap-  
 ter of *Isaiah*, and addressed to St. *John*,

<sup>a</sup> *Isai.* lxi. 1.

<sup>b</sup> *Ibid.* xi. 1, 2.

Sect. VII.

is as followeth --- Go shew John again, that the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of might and counsel, which *Isaiah* foretold should rest upon the Rod and Branch of Jesse, and which *John* saw descending and abiding upon me, in the likeness of a dove, at my baptism, is not departed from me. The unction of the Spirit was not given me for mine own use; nor is it spent, or consumed, although it hath powerfully diffused itself to all about me. By it the poor are made rich, being instated in the kingdom of grace and of the gospel, and anointed heirs unto the kingdom of glory. By it every contrite heart is healed; such as were shut up are set at liberty; such as were bound are loosed; and by it the yoke of the oppressor is broken<sup>a</sup>.

WE must not omit to mention the end for which, according to the prophet, all these changes were wrought in the converts to the Gospel; "That they might be called Trees of Righteousness, the planting of the Lord,

<sup>a</sup> See the Works of Dr Jackson, Vol. ii. p. 542.

" that



“that he might be glorified.” The “Rod,” the “Branch of Jesse,” the “Righteous Branch of David,” were the known titles of the Messiah, or Son of David; and it was his glory, while he lived upon earth, to make others, like himself, “Trees,” or “Plants of Righteousness.” This expression, as it standeth here joined with others plainly descriptive of evangelical benefits and comforts, unfoldeth to us the true nature of those wonders which *Isaiah* foretold should be wrought in the wilderness, and which he hath represented under so rich a variety of poetical imagery; such as, streams of water breaking forth in the desarts, causing them to blossom as the rose; myrtles coming up, instead of briars; cedars, firs, and olive trees, instead of thorns, &c. The purport of these figurative predictions appears, by the passage before us, to be this; that the dry and barren places of *Judea*, where *John* baptized, and preached repentance, should, in the days of the Messiah, become a fruitful nursery of a new kind of plants, prepared for the celestial pa-

Sect. VII. radise. These were men of humble; peaceable, contrite hearts; such as poverty and disease had rendered those who came to be healed by Christ, and the consideration of our sins and infirmities should render us all. To such is the gospel of the kingdom preached, and they with joy receive it. "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted."

To these beatitudes let us add one more, with which our Lord concludeth his answer to the question asked by *John's* disciples. "Blessed is he whosoever is not offended in me." In other words ---- And now, blessed, thrice blessed are all they, who shall so consider the wonderful works done by me, as not to be offended at my poor and lowly appearance, during the time of my humiliation and suffering here on earth; or at the seeming harshness of my salutary doctrines to flesh and blood. For I well know, that many, though they have beheld me giving sight to the  
blind,

blind, and vigour to the impotent, Sect. VII.  
cleansing lepers, making the deaf to  
hear, and raising the dead to life again;  
yet, because the truths, which I deliver,  
are contrary to their interests, their  
pleasures, their pride, their prejudices,  
which they are determined not to quit,  
even for the kingdom of heaven; many,  
I say, will reject what they cannot but  
acknowledge to be the counsel of God,  
and put away the word of salvation from  
them. Let a man only suppress his in-  
ordinate desires of things temporal, and  
he will be disposed to hear what I shall  
tell him of things eternal. Let him  
cease to love the world, and he will  
cease to have any objection to the Gos-  
pel. Let but his heart be open to con-  
viction, and when the evidence hath  
been once fairly laid before him, he  
will never again ask the question, "Art  
thou he that should come, or do we  
look for another?"

## SECTION VIII.

*Considerations on the circumstances of  
St. John's Death.*

Sect. VIII.

WE have now accompanied St. *John* through the several stages of his life. We have rejoiced with his parents and kinsfolk at his birth, and spent some time in contemplation with him in the deserts; we have stood by him, as a preacher and a baptist, at the river *Jordan*, and have been made acquainted with the repeated testimonies born by him, at different times, to the Messiahship of Jesus; we have heard him, like another *Elijah*, reprov- ing another *Ahab*, and have visited him in prison, where the glory of his great Master, and the salvation of those committed to his care, still continued to be the objects of his attention. It remains only, that we behold him paying that debt to nature, from which the greatest of them that are born of women are not



not exempted. And here our acquaint-<sup>sect.VIII.</sup>ance with him must end, till we meet him in the kingdom of God. Thus do scenes of real life pass swiftly away, and, when looked back upon, appear like those which are described within the compass of a small volume like this. In the course of a few years, the child, at whose birth we made merry, is become a man; he sickens, and dies, and we mourn at his funeral. Some gleams of success and prosperity, perhaps, brighten and adorn certain parts of his life, as the sun gilds the edges of a dark cloud, or imprints upon it the still more beautiful colours of the rainbow. But while we gaze, the sun sets, the colours fade, the bow vanishes, and “the place thereof knoweth it no more.”

OF prophets, as well as of kings, it may be observed, that there is generally but a short interval between their imprisonment and their death; the enmity which occasioned one, seldom leaving them, till it have accomplished the other. And “more bitter even than death itself is the woman whose heart is  
“ snares

Sect. VIII. "snares and nets, and her hands bands"<sup>a</sup>."

*Herod* had thrown *John* into prison; but this would not satisfy *Herodias*. Even there she heard him still preaching upon the old text, and reproaching her with her crimes. "She had a quarrel against him; *επειξευ αυτω*, she fastened upon him, and would have killed him, but," for some time, she "could not<sup>b</sup>." For though *Herod* had not religion enough to produce in him the fear of God, he had policy enough to produce the fear of the Jews, among whom *John's* reputation, as a prophet, ran very high. *Herodias*, however, in her heart, had determined to effect her purpose by procuring, sooner or later, the execution of him whom she falsely deemed her enemy. As if sin could not be committed with impunity, while *John* was living to hear of it; as if his blood would not cry louder than his voice had done; or the head of the prophet could enter the palace, without reproving the adultery of the tetrarch. But an imperious lust, in the height of

<sup>a</sup> Eccles. vii. 26.

<sup>b</sup> Mark vi. 19, &c.

it's career, can brook no obstruction; Sect. VIII. and were it possible, as well as necessary, the world itself would be blown up to make way for it.

SIN being once resolved on in the heart, an opportunity of committing it is seldom long wanting; and the mind is upon the watch, to embrace the very first that offers. "When a convenient day was come, that Herod's birth day should be kept, he made a great supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee." It is certainly no sin in a prince to keep his birth day, or to make a great supper upon it. But how much it behoveth a man, at such times of rejoicing, to be upon his guard, lest unawares he be induced to sacrifice truth and conscience to mirth and gaiety, the melancholy catastrophe of this banquet may shew us; since neither *Herod*, nor any of his guests imagined, when they sat down to table on that fatal evening, how horribly their great supper would conclude. But so it happened, that, before the night was out, a deed was done, which displayed to all succeeding

Sec. VIII. generations the malice and cruelty of *Herodias*, with the weakness and wickedness of *Herod*; teaching us, at the same time, that the greatest of prophets and the best of men are not more secure from violence, than from natural death, but rather more exposed to it than the rest of mankind, if with fidelity and fortitude they execute the trust committed to them.

HERODIAS, by her lawful husband *Philip*, had a daughter named *Salome*, who condescended to grace the festivity by dancing before the company, in a manner which “pleased Herod, and “them that sat with him.” A pious prelate of our church, in his contemplations on this occurrence, observes, that “dancing, in itself, as it is a set, “regular, harmonious, graceful motion “of the body, cannot be unlawful, any “more than walking, or running.” We may add, that it hath in all ages and nations been one way, and that a natural one, of expressing an uncommon degree of joy and gladness; on which account it was adopted into the number of religious ceremonies formerly en-  
joined

joined to be observed by the people of Sec. VIII. God. But for a young lady to appear, as a dancer, before *Herod* and his "lords, "high captains, and chief estates of "Galilee," probably, when they were well warmed with wine, became only the daughter of an *Herodias*, educated by her own mother.

HEROD, quite overcome and thrown off his guard by *Salome's* performance, makes her a foolish promise; and, as if that was not enough, confirms it with a rash oath; "Whatsoever thou shalt "ask of me, I will give it thee, to "the half of my kingdom." A very handsome recompence, one would think, for a dance! But it will appear presently, that the king had not offered enough. Half his kingdom would not do. Something was required more valuable than the whole of it, had it extended from *Judea*, quite round the globe. Nothing would satisfy, but his honour, his conscience, his soul; the price which sin never fails to ask! The glorious golden opportunity of revenge was not to be lost. *Herodias* is consulted

Sec. VIII. by her daughter, and lo, the soft, tender, delicate *Salome* reenters, all athirst for blood --- “Give me in a charger “the head of John the Baptist;” of a prophet; of a person whom thou knowest to be innocent, holy, upright. Make me this sacrifice, and I am content. With such eagerness and sagacity does “the adulteress hunt for “the precious life!”

BAD as *Herod* was, the petition of *Salome* at first shocked him. “The king “was sorry.” He thought of *John’s* character, the atrociousness of the murder, and the opinion which the world would entertain of the murderer. But the tide, which had ebbed, soon flowed again, and obliterated, in a moment, what had been written on the sand, during it’s recess. The love of *Herodias*, the address of *Salome*, the festivity of the season, and the presence of the “lords “and high captains,” who had been witnesses of the promise, and might possibly approve the proposal; all these circumstances on the side of the temptation prevailed. And perhaps, *Herod*, upon recollection, might think that the  
 supposed

supposed obligation of his oath would Sect. VIII.  
 afford him a better excuse than he should  
 ever be master of again, for complying  
 with the importunity of *Herodias*, and  
 taking off a monitor troublesome to them  
 both. “For his oath’s sake, and for  
 “their sakes which sat with him, he  
 “would not reject her.” Thus, if any  
 extraordinary wickedness is to be trans-  
 acted, religion must be made a cover  
 for it. As if wrong became right, when  
 acted in the name of God; and it were  
 more acceptable in his sight, to massacre  
 a prophet, than to repent of a rash oath  
 made to a foolish girl, at a drunken en-  
 tertainment.

THE Baptist’s fate being thus de-  
 termined, “immediately the king sent  
 “an executioner, and commanded his  
 “head to be brought: and he went  
 “and beheaded him in the prison.”  
 This deed of darkness must have been  
 done in the season proper for it, the  
 middle of the night, and St. *John* was  
 probably awakened, to receive his sen-  
 tence, out of that sleep, which truth  
 and innocence can secure to their pos-  
 sessor, in any situation. The generality  
 of

SECT. VIII. of mankind have reason enough to deprecate a sudden death, lest it should surprize them in one of their many unguarded hours. But to St. *John* no hour could be such. He had finished the work which God had given him to do. He had kept the faith, and preserved a conscience void of offence. He had done his duty, and waited daily and hourly, we may be sure, for his departure. He was now, therefore, called off from his station with honour, to quit the well fought field for the palace of the Great King; to refresh himself, after the dust, and toil, and heat of the day, by bathing in the fountain of life and immortality; to exchange his blood-stained armour for a robe of glory, and to have his temporary labours rewarded with eternal rest; to sit down with *Abraham*, and *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, in the kingdom of God; and, as the Friend of the Bridegroom, to enter into the joy of his Lord. From the darkness and confinement of a prison he passed to the liberty and light of heaven; and while malice was gratified with a sight of his head, and his body was carried by a few friends  
in



in silence to the grave, his immortal Sect. VIII.  
 spirit repaired to a court, where no  
*Herod* desires to have his brother's wife;  
 where no *Herodias* thirsts after the blood  
 of a prophet; where he who hath la-  
 boured, with sincerity and diligence, in  
 the work of reformation, is sure to be  
 well received; where holiness, zeal,  
 and constancy “are crowned and re-  
 “ceive palms from the Son of God,  
 “whom they confessed in the world.”

*So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,  
 And yet anon uprears his drooping head,  
 And tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore  
 Flames in the forehead of the morning sky—  
 He bears the unexpressive nuptial song  
 In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.  
 There entertain him all the saints above,  
 In solemn troops, and sweet societies,  
 That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
 And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.*

MILTON.

\* 2 Esdr. ii. 45—47.

T H E E N D.

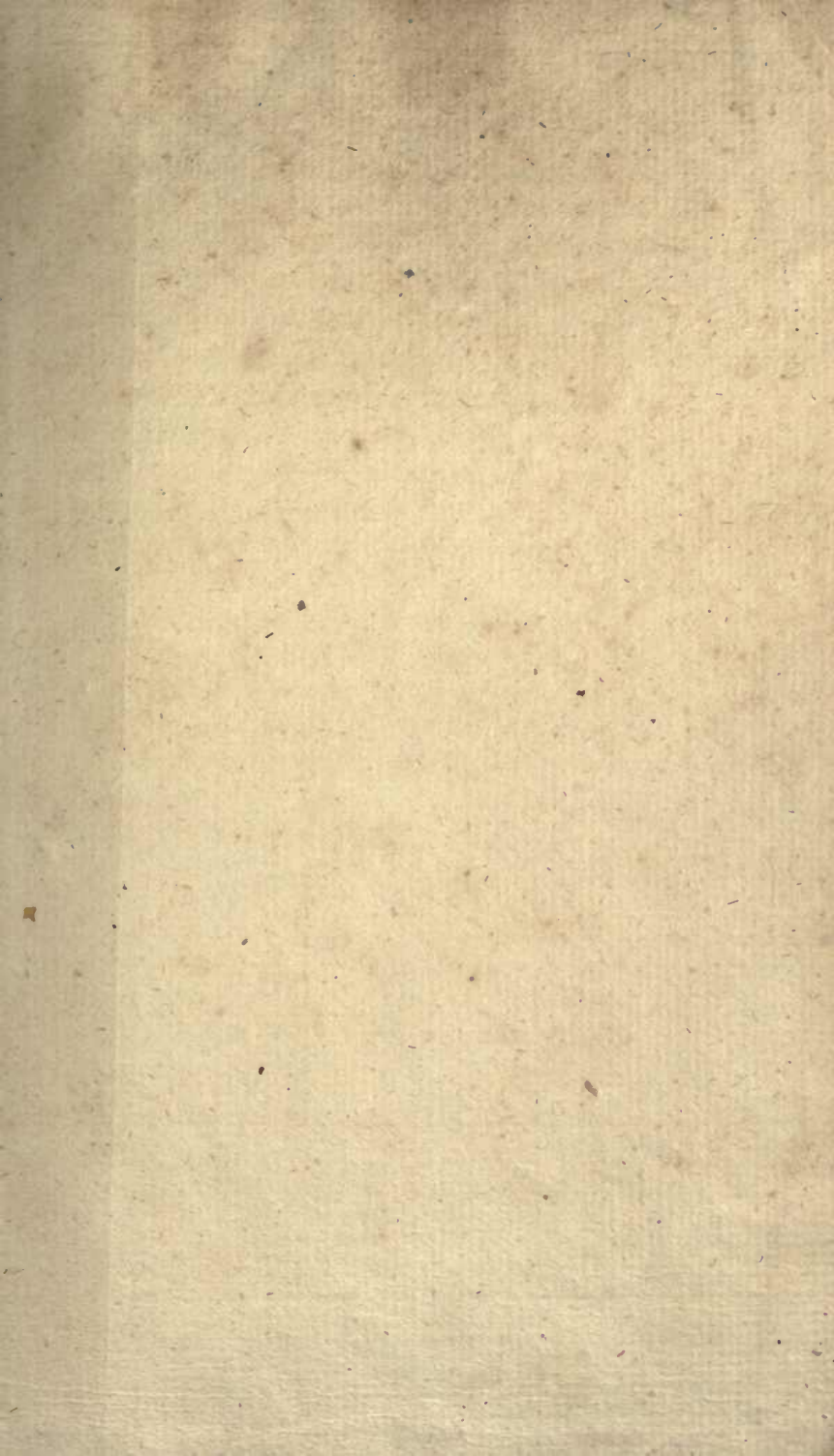
in silence to the grave, his immortal  
spirit repaired to a court, where no  
knew desire to have his brother's wife;  
where no wicked man thinks after the blood  
of a prophet; where he who hath be-  
hoared, with sincerity and diligence, in  
the work of reformation, is sure to be  
well received; where holiness, zeal,  
and constancy "are crowned and re-  
ceive palms from the Son of God,  
"whom they confessed in the world."

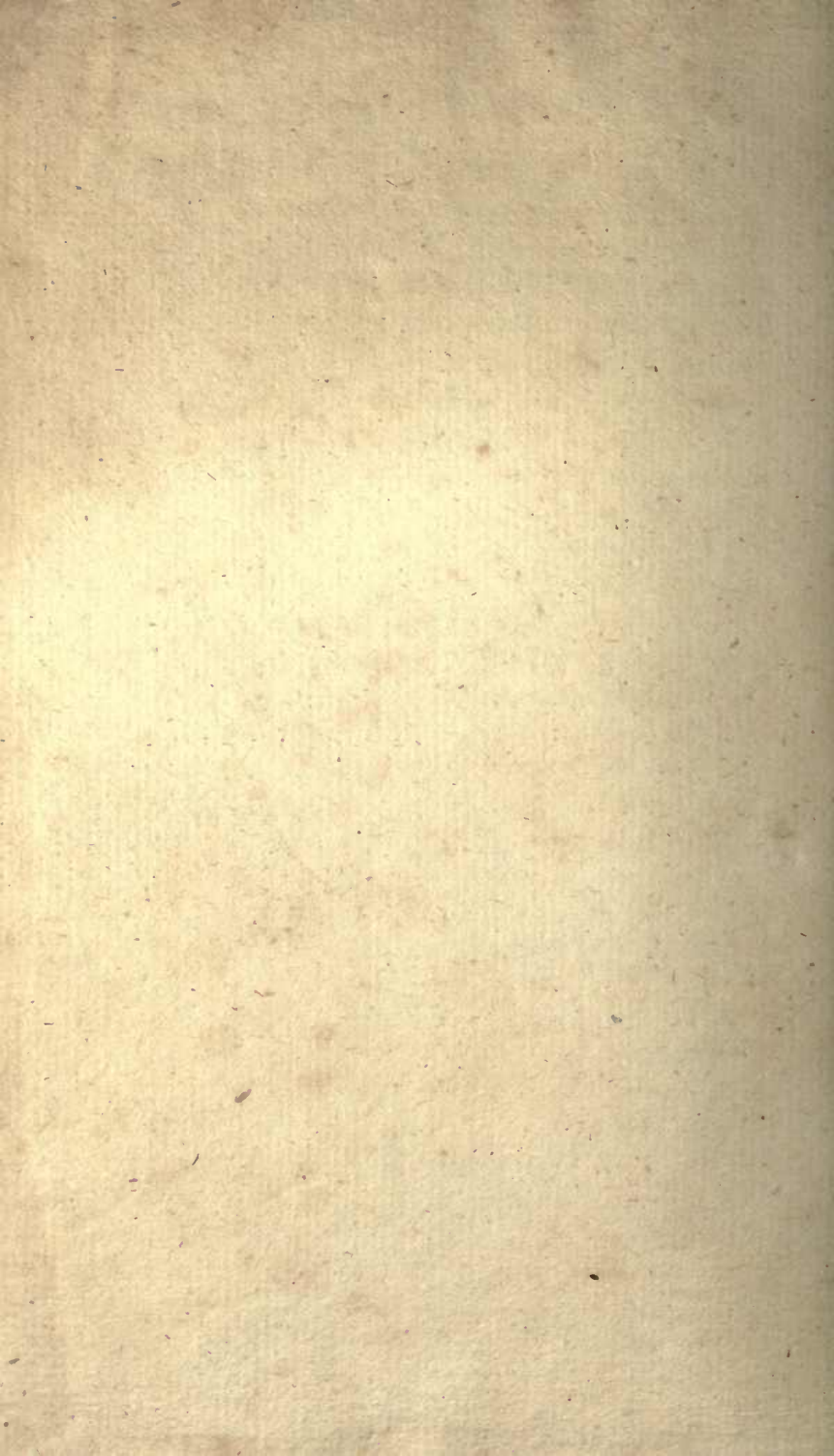
So light the day for in the even had  
that we soon up rose his sleeping head,  
and with his beam, and with his glowing eye  
flames in the forehead of the morning lay  
He bent the unresponsive capital say  
In the light kingdoms such of joy and love  
Your certain time all the time above  
In solemn trees, and forest solitude  
That sing, and singing in their glory move  
And with the tears for ever flow in sea

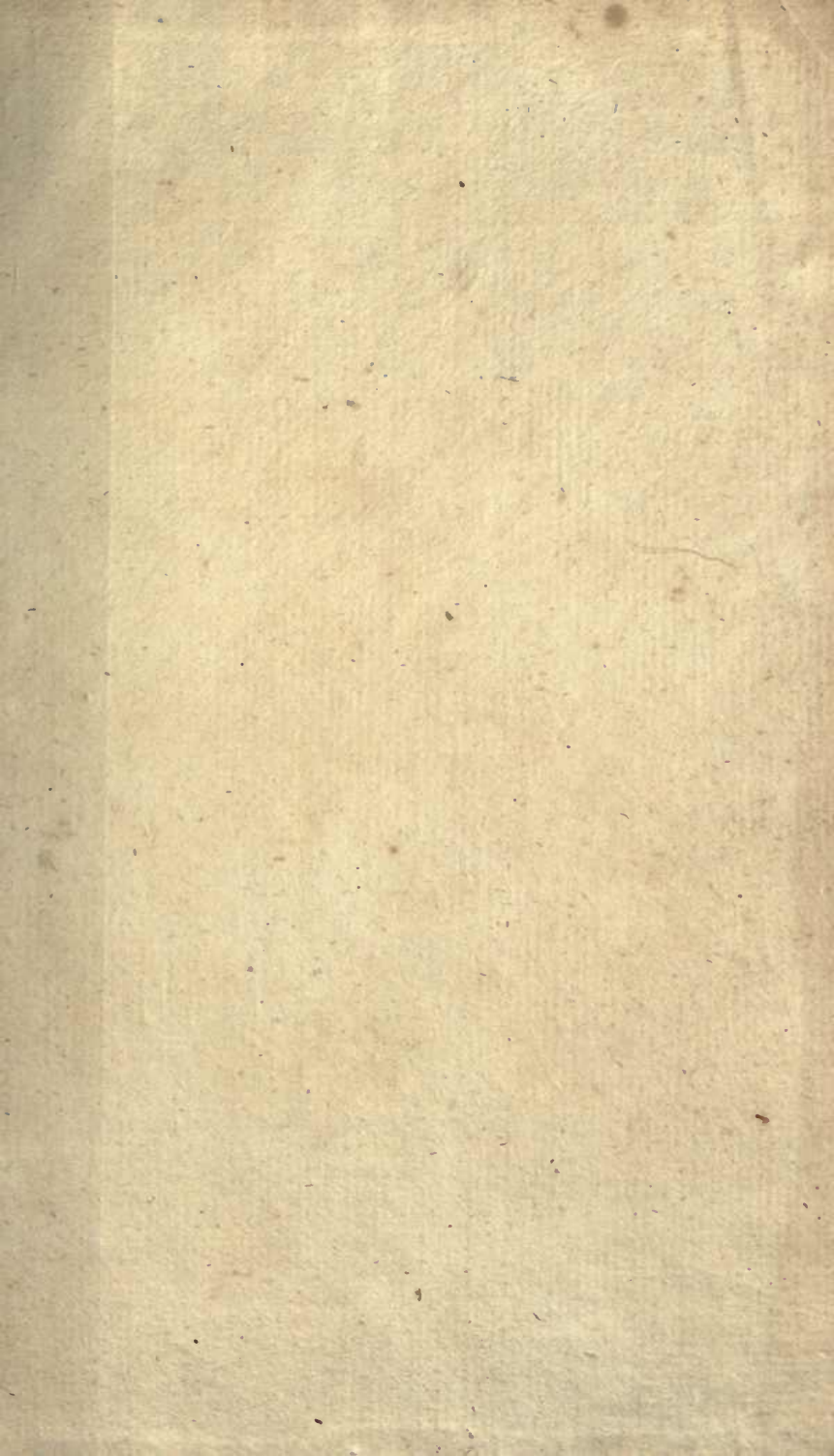
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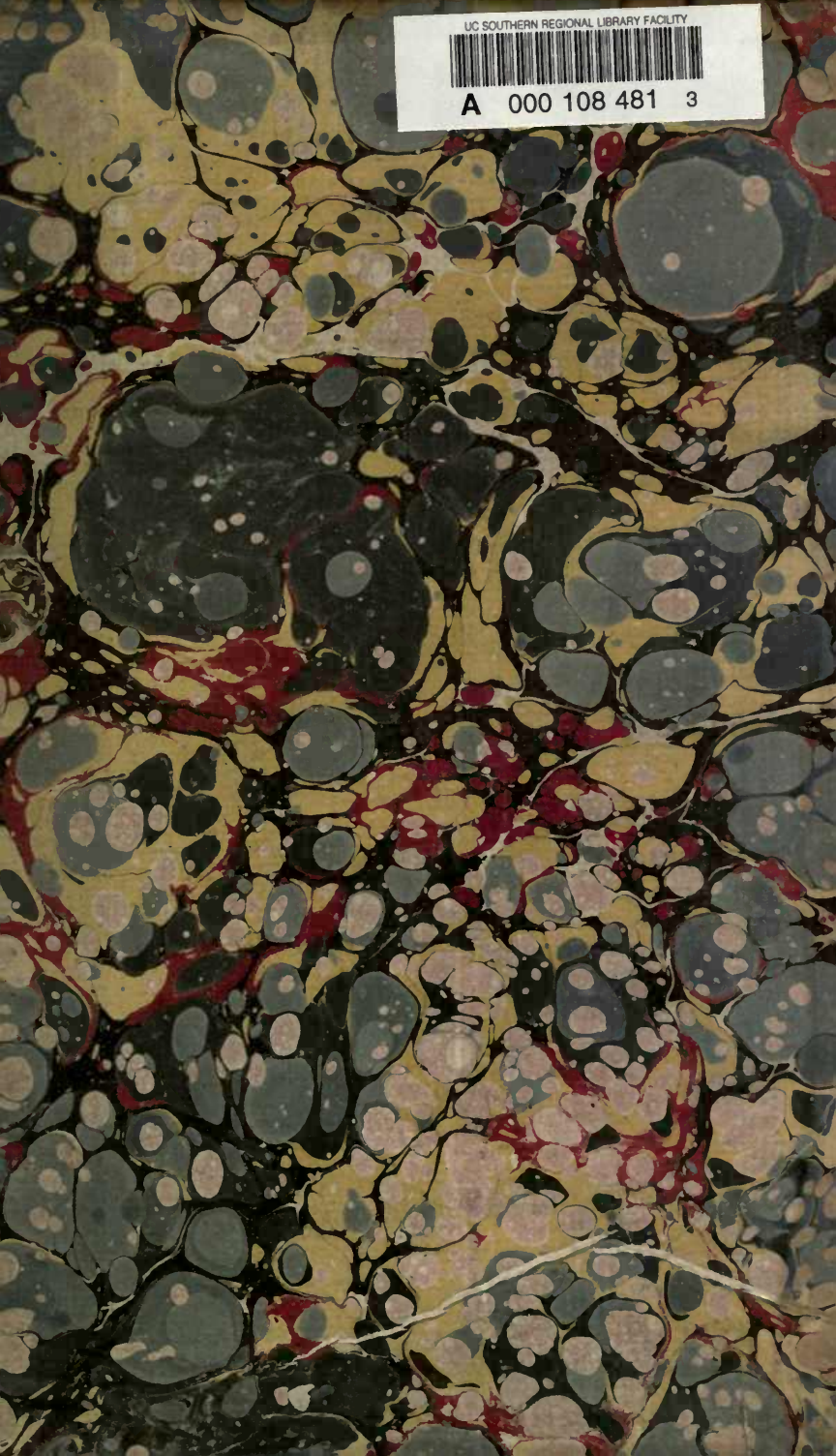
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