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SERMONS

ON

INFIDELITY.

BY ANDREW THOMSON, D. D.
MINISTER OF ST GEORGE'S, EDINBURGH.

FIRST AMERICAN EDITION,
WITH A
PRELIMINARY ESSAY

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PRELIMINARY ESSAY,

BY THE AMERICAN EDITORS.

The work which we now present to the public is, in some respects, peculiar in its character. Most treatises, intended to establish men in the Christian faith, have been written in *defense* of Christianity, and have of course been chiefly occupied in exhibiting the evidences of its truth. Our author adopts a different system of warfare. He leaves defensive operations to others, and commences an attack upon infidelity itself. He makes the infidel feel that things may be said against his doctrine, which it is no easy task to answer, and which must be answered, or he cannot, with any appearance of reason, retain his infidelity. The infidel is thus put upon the defensive; and, as the diligent reader of this treatise will perceive, the successful defense of infidelity is impossible. That infidelity has its origin in evil; that it leads its votaries to reject all religion; that it depraves their morals; that it destroys their happiness; that, for these reasons, it is worthy to be abhorred and avoided, are charges which our author brings forward and sustains; and the infidel can neither disprove their truth, nor escape from the conclusion to which they lead.

Another peculiarity of the work, arising naturally out of that just mentioned, is this: The author takes pains to fix the charge of infidelity on all to whom it belongs. He would make all who are infidels in spirit and in practice, know and feel that the argument applies to *them*,—that, however they may disguise it under the forms and profession of Christianity even, still they really belong to the ranks of infidelity, and, continuing as they are, must encounter the woes that cluster around its path, for they partake of its guilt. And on these con-

siderations, in the end, he grounds an exhortation to men of every class and station, to exert themselves for the expulsion of infidelity from the world.

Our author's plan, therefore, did not demand, nor even permit, a full exhibition of the evidences of Christianity. He has barely alluded to some of them in the second sermon. Among them, he mentions "the experimental evidence," with as much apparent confidence in its validity as any other. This species of evidence has not usually received such treatment. Most, who have alluded to it, have seemed to regard it as satisfactory, perhaps, to the Christian, but of little or no use when addressed to others. We shall attempt, in the short space which the compass of this volume allows us, to rescue this species of evidence from this neglect, and to show what influence it ought to have, on the minds of those who have no experience of the truth of Christianity; and we do this the more readily, because we think it will serve to strengthen our author's conclusion, that infidelity has its source in the badness of the heart.

The Bible lays down, as the law of righteousness, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" in other words, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." This, every man knows, or may know, to be right. He need not ask how or by whom the words of this law were first published on earth. He need not inquire through what channel they have been handed down to us, whether they have always been accurately transcribed, or whether they are correctly translated. He need not resort to any *testimony* whatever. He has only to look at this law, and honestly ask himself, "Is not this *right*?" His own mind will give the answer. The eyes of his own understanding can see its righteousness, without extraneous aid. Every man knows, or may know, that so much of the Bible is true, is right, is binding upon *him*. He may know this for himself;—not merely admit it as probable, all things considered; not merely be convinced by a balance of testimony that it comes from a trust-worthy source; but he may know, absolutely know, for himself, from his own contemplation of this law, that it is and must be true and right, and that to deny or doubt its truth and righteousness, is absurd.

The Bible teaches that men are sinners,—transgressors of this law. This, too, every one knows, or may know, to be true of himself. Every one knows, or may know, that he has not always done unto others, as he would that they should do unto him; that he has not always spoken of them, as he would that they should speak of him; that he has not always felt towards them, as he would that they should feel towards him; and that therein he has done wrong—has sinned. He need not be dependent on others for this knowledge. He has only to look at the law, which he knows is right, and at himself, as conscious of having violated that law, in order to see for himself, and know with absolute certainty, that he has done wrong, that he is blame-worthy, that he is a sinner. No possible decision of any question of ancient history, or criticism, or any other subject whatever, can rightfully be allowed to throw a single shade of doubt over this decision—*that we have done wrong*. Though it be said that the Bible is translated incorrectly, or the original has been altered, or the apostles never wrote it, or they were deceivers or deceived, or that Christ never lived, or even that there is no God,—still, we know, absolutely know, that we have done wrong. On this point, too, the Bible, as we have it, speaks the truth.

The Bible teaches us, too, that “there is no peace to the wicked;” that they “are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest.” But we must be careful that we do not misunderstand this doctrine. The Bible not only grants, but teaches, that the wicked may be very prosperous in their temporal affairs, and very careless of their spiritual interests. They may forget God, forget duty, forget their own accountability; and in their forgetfulness and their thoughtlessness, they may sing and dance and make merry, and glory in their victory over conscience, the fear of God and the anticipations of another world. But still, they have no *peace*; nothing in which their minds *rest*, as a satisfying good. They are ever disquieted with a restless hankering after some good, which they have never yet tasted; after a happiness, differing not in degree merely, but in kind, from any thing they have ever enjoyed. At least, there is a restlessness about them

which, they may see, if they will reflect, no degree of such enjoyment as they have yet found can ever remove. Whether it can be removed at all, or whether this continual dissatisfaction with our present state and aspiration after something higher is the necessary condition of intellectual existence, is altogether a distinct question. The Bible says that the wicked are without rest. We know that we are wicked, and without rest. And when we consider our restlessness, what it respects, and whence it springs, we know that all other wicked intelligent beings must be restless too. So far the Bible is true. We know it to be true. We depend not on the testimony of others, but we see its truth for ourselves.

The Bible promises "rest unto the soul," on condition that we obey its requirements. This promise is given, with direct reference to the restlessness just mentioned; and as that restlessness is a matter of consciousness, so also the rest promised, if ever attained, will be a matter of consciousness. We now know that we are disquieted. We shall then know that we are disquieted no longer; that we have found that, for the want of which we were formerly restless. If peace of mind, tranquillity of conscience, is given us, we can know by our own consciousness, that we enjoy it. If our views of Christian truth and performance of Christian duties fill us with peace, it is possible for us to *know* that they fill us with peace. Our knowledge of it will not, in any degree, depend on the testimony of others. We need not come to this knowledge by any process of argumentation, in which there might be an undetected fallacy. The fact; that we do take such views of Christian truth, and that these views do give us peace, even that peace which we could never find from any other source, and for want of which we were always disquieted, these facts lie wholly within the circle of our own consciousness, and we may know them just as we know that we are glad, or sorry, or that we hope, fear, or doubt.—We do not say of this knowledge, that all have it, for some are evidently destitute of it; nor, at this stage of the argument, that all can have it, for this would be *taking for granted* the truth of the Bible on this point. We only say that if the promise of the Bible is fulfilled, those to whom it

is fulfilled may know it; not merely think it probable, but *know* it.

The Bible promises, along with this rest, and as the result of those views which give us peace, a strength of holy purpose, which shall enable us to do our duty. It does not promise that we shall enjoy this in *perfection* at first, or even during this life; but it does promise that these views shall give us a strength of spirit to resist temptation and perform Christian duty, of which we were previously destitute, and which, by the cultivation the Bible requires, shall increase as we grow older in the service of Christ. It does not promise that we shall continually grow purer in our own eyes; for, as we ascend one height after another in our progress towards the throne of eternal purity, "Alps on Alps" shall arise before us, and new and higher prospects of holiness become visible and visibly accessible to us, and we shall find ourselves farther from the summit than we supposed ourselves to be when at the base; but it promises us a real progress, an increasing mastery over those views and feelings which formerly led us astray, and an increasing readiness and delight in the performance of those duties to which we were formerly averse. If this promise be fulfilled, its fulfilment will be a matter of consciousness, and we may truly *know* that this part of the Bible is true.

Now suppose,—and the imagination, even of an unbeliever, must be able to make the supposition—that a person has actually found evidence of all these points in his own consciousness;—has seen and known that the moral law of the gospel is right, and binding upon him; that he has transgressed that law, and is blameworthy for his transgression; that, by this his wickedness, he has deprived himself of peace; that he has received the doctrines of the gospel, and relies on them as really true; that this reception and reliance has given him the peace which he had lost by transgression, and brought him back to the righteousness from which he had departed. If he knows all this, he knows he has done right, he has done what both his duty and his interest demand, in receiving the gospel as true. In other words, he knows he ought to receive it as true. In other words, *he knows that it is true*. To him the Savior has fulfilled the promise made

to all who will do the will of the Father, that they "shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

If such a man can be found, we ask, why is he not a credible witness to these truths,—truths of which he has personal knowledge? Why may he not testify that he knows Christianity to be true? And what good reason can any one give, for rejecting his testimony? We grant that his testimony, if received, cannot place those who receive it on the same ground on which the witness himself stands, and on which, if the gospel be true, they ought to stand. It will not give them a personal acquaintance with its truth; but it will give them the same reason for receiving it, which they have for receiving any statement whatever on the testimony of others.

But we need not deal in suppositions. We have such witnesses in abundance. In many nations, in every age, in every condition of life, we find those who testify that they do know that the gospel is true. Not only do they think it probable; not only have they examined the historic evidence, which proves the authenticity of its documents; not only have they found sufficient testimony that Jesus lived, and said and did what the Bible ascribes to him; not only have they believed these things on the testimony of others, but they have experienced the truth of the scriptures in their own persons, and when they bear witness to the truth of Christianity, they testify that which they know by their own consciousness. "The true martyrs of Jesus Christ," says Edwards, "are not those who have only been strong in opinion that the gospel of Christ is true, but those that have seen the truth of it; as the very name, martyrs, or witnesses, implies. All the saints, who, by their holy practice under great trials, declare that faith—can speak in the style of witnesses, and not only say that they *think* the gospel is divine, but they say, it *is* divine, giving it in as their testimony, because they have seen it to be so." He is here speaking of what is common to all Christians, by whom, he tells us, "the truth of all those things which the Scriptures say about experimental religion is known; for now they are experienced." Says Wollebins, "as he who has himself tasted honey knows its sweetness much better than he who believes it to be

sweet on the testimony of another, so he who has tasted the sweetness of the holy Scriptures knows them to be the word of God, much better than he who believes on the testimony of the church;” and a little after, he tells us that the latter have only an *opinion* that the Bible is from God, but the former have absolute knowledge of its truth. But we need not multiply quotations. Every body knows that the gospel is proclaimed in the world, as a means of bestowing righteousness and peace on those who believe; and, as every body knows, multitudes testify that they have believed, and found it sufficient for this purpose; that it has given them a peace, a “rest unto their souls,” a disgust at sin, and a longing for righteousness, such as it promises, and such as sinners need. They testify that they know this, just as you know that you are a sinner, and that sin makes you unhappy. And shall not their testimony be received?

Why shall it not? And why shall not this testimony of living witnesses, with whom we are personally acquainted, who testify only what they themselves know, —why shall it not settle the point, as far as any point can be settled by testimony?

The witnesses are sufficiently numerous. We state this, not because the testimony of one competent witness is not sufficient; but because, with many, the number of witnesses increase the weight of the testimony. On the point before us, all who profess an experimental acquaintance with Christianity are witnesses. They are numerous in every man’s neighborhood. There are now on earth, many millions of them. They are of every age, sex, rank and condition of life, and belong to every country, nearly, under heaven. They bear united testimony, that they *know* the Bible to be true, by their own experience.

They are sufficiently respectable. This must be acknowledged, whether we consider their intellect, their information, their integrity, or the union of all. The testimony of so many of them as perhaps every sceptic in the land is acquainted with, would be received as conclusive by any jury, on any point at issue before them. On other subjects, any historian would willingly risk his reputation, by recording what they testify as matter of fact; any statesman would consider their testimony as

to important facts, sufficient warrant for shaping the whole course of his policy accordingly; and any man of business would embark his capital, as their testimony concerning facts should indicate. On other subjects, they would be believed. Shall they not on this? If not, what reason can be given for disbelief?

Are they interested? In general, they are not, except as every man is interested for the truth. And besides, they are, generally, persons whom all who know them would believe, even on subjects where they are evidently and deeply interested.

Is it said, they are fanatics? We must inquire what is meant by this charge. If fanaticism means earnest feeling in favor of the truth, perhaps they have good reason for their fanaticism, and are none the worse witnesses for it. But if it means, that their feelings are excited by error, the charge of fanaticism is just begging the question. It is merely saying, we do not believe what they testify, because what they testify is not true.

If the charge of fanaticism means to imply, that this subject, on which they profess to have knowledge, is one on which no knowledge can be had, we have seen already that the accusation is false. Men may have, and actually do have, the evidence of their own consciousness, that they are wicked, that they are wretched, that they receive the gospel and are healed by it.

If it be said that our consciousness is not certain proof, we reply that no proof can possibly be more certain. Even mathematical demonstration receives all its force from the fact, that we are *conscious* of perceiving its truth. And besides; we would ask the objector, if he is *quite certain* that he has any doubts on the subject. If he is, then he grants that consciousness may make a man quite certain; for he has no other way of finding out whether he doubts or not. If he says *no*, then we may safely put off answering his doubts, till it becomes certain that he has them. In asserting that he doubts, he concedes the point in debate.

From this argument there is no escape by fair means. The thing to be proved is a plain matter of fact; an event, of which, if it take place, somebody must be conscious, and which, therefore, is a point, suitable to be established by testimony. Here are the thousands of un-

unpeachable witnesses, all testifying that it has happened; that they *know* it has happened; that they are conscious of its happening. What shall be said against their testimony? That there are some in the world who have never experienced the truth of the gospel? There are quite as many who have never seen the satellites of Jupiter. Does that disprove their existence? There are thousands who know not that Handel's Messiah is excellent music. Does that prove that no one knows it? No more does the fact, that some have not attained to a personal knowledge of the truth of the gospel, prove that all others are ignorant as they.

The objection, that this testimony is not to be received, because some who bear it are dishonest men, while immense numbers of them are known to be honest, deserves no serious notice. We only ask that due credit be given to those whose honesty is unquestionable.

Perhaps the true character of infidelity, and the bearing of this argument upon it, may be better seen, by applying it to another, and so far as this argument is concerned, a perfectly parallel case.

At some seminary of learning is a student, who ought forthwith to commence the study of Euclid's Elements; but he has various doubts and objections. He says, "I doubt whether I shall learn any thing valuable from the study of this book. I strongly suspect it is the fabrication of some modern author, and that its doctrines are either unimportant or false. I have heard of some disputes about the authorship,—whether Euclid wrote the whole, or whether the propositions only are his, and the demonstrations the work of another. I perceive, too, there are some passages, in which all copies do not agree, even in the Greek, and that we have several translations into English, no two of which are exactly alike. I know that, in the business I intend to follow, a knowledge of geometry is indispensable; but before trusting myself to the guidance of this book, I must have better evidence of its worthiness to be trusted. If Euclid knew its doctrines to be true, his knowledge might satisfy his own mind: but I cannot, therefore, give up my mind to whatever he is reported to have said."

We might say to such an objector, "You know that all mathematicians, from the days of Euclid to the pres-

ent, have thought highly of his work, and had full confidence in his doctrines." "No," says the Tyro; "I do not know that. I grant, it is true of all whose opinions I have seen; but, perhaps, there have been some of whom I never heard, who have been excellent geometers without receiving his doctrines." "You grant, then, that the general testimony has been in his favor?" "Yes, the testimony of those whose testimony his admirers and followers have collected—of those who have got their living by teaching his doctrines, or practising upon them, or whose titles to some part of their lands might be disputed, if his doctrines were overthrown. A long succession of such, I know, *are said* to have spoken in his favor. But, even if they have, am I obliged to adopt their opinions of him? or rather, the opinions of him, which they have expressed?" "But here are your Professors and Tutors, whom you know and respect. They tell you the book is made up of entire truth, and that your way to the knowledge you need, lies through its pages." "Yes, but some of them are old, and formed their opinions in a less enlightened age; and all of them have a professional prejudice in favor of what it is their business to teach." "Here, then, are your fellow students of the classes just before you. Some of them have just concluded the study, and are applying its principles to other departments of knowledge. Others are now in the midst of it. They all testify in its favor." "No, not all of them. There are several in each class, who have always thought as I do, and neglected the book accordingly." "And who, therefore, are no judges of its merits." "I suppose I must grant that; but some, who speak well of it, show no attachment to it, and I very much doubt their sincerity, or rather, I have evidence that their praises are hypocritical." "But many, you must allow, really believe what they say in its favor." "Yes, I must allow that they believe it. But they may mistake." "But what is their testimony? that they *are of the opinion* that the doctrines of Euclid are true, or that they *know* them to be true?" "Certainly, they profess to *know* them to be true." "And on any other point, you would believe their testimony. Why should you reject it now, when they testify that they *know* Euclid to

be true?" "Why, their very pretense, that they know certainly, and beyond the possibility of mistake, shows that they are enthusiastic, fanatical, and, on this subject, unworthy of credit." "Are you *quite certain* that it shows this? Do you *know* that you do not mistake in this matter?" "I think I do not." "Are you *quite sure* that you think so? Is it *absolutely certain*, that you doubt their testimony in the least? Do you *know* you are not fully convinced by it, that Euclid is worthy of your attention?" "Suppose I say, yes." "Then you must grant that absolute knowledge is possible. If you can certainly know one thing, they may, with equal certainty, know another. Is not their reputation for veracity as good as yours?" "I grant it is." "Have you not, then, as much reason to believe that they *know* Euclid to be true, as I have to believe that you doubt it?" "I acknowledge I have, if that which they testify were capable of being certainly known." "And who is the best judge of that—they, who have studied it, or you, who have not?" "They, I confess." "And they testify, both that it is capable of being known, and that they know it." "The testimony, I confess, is very strong; but I have looked into Euclid several times, without ever gaining any of this certain knowledge, and the same is true of several others." "Euclid, you know, has arranged his propositions in a certain order, in which he intended they should be studied. Have you ever applied yourself to the work, in the way which he intended those should do, who would obtain the knowledge it contains?" "I cannot say that I have." "Then you could not reasonably expect to know for yourself the truth of his doctrines. In order for that, you must use the book as its author intended it to be used, and as all have used it, who have been successful in their use of it. The testimony of which we have been speaking is sufficient to warrant you in doing this, with the confident hope of success."

We ask, must not a candid mind regard this reasoning as satisfactory? and can this student, with any propriety, profess to retain his doubts and act upon them? And though, in some respects, not essential to the argument, the cases are not parallel, can he who, with the testimony of all the pious before him, continues to neglect the

Bible as a book of doubtful character, lay any better claim to be thought a fair and consistent reasoner? In both cases, the doubter is one who, by his own account, has no right to expect to know for himself, whether the book is true or not. And in both cases, he has testimony which ought to satisfy him, that others have found it and do know it to be true and worthy of his attention, and that by attending to it as he ought, he may at length know its truth for himself.

Why, then, we ask—and whoever feels any inclination to retain his infidelity is bound to give a satisfactory answer—why do any receive Euclid and reject the Bible? It is not because the evidence in favor of Euclid is in itself any more conclusive; for such, we have seen, is not the fact. Euclid is taken up and read with full confidence that it will be found a safe and sufficient guide; but, though the Bible is recommended by evidence of the same kind, from sources at least equally respectable, and in much greater abundance, the same persons, in many instances, refuse to give it the same confidence. The different treatment of the two books does not arise from any difference in the evidence by which both are proved to be trustworthy. We can assign a reason for it, which, beyond doubt, exists, and is sufficient to account for the phenomenon. It is this. A man may admit that Euclid is true, and yet be at liberty to do as he pleases about studying it; or he may acquaint himself with its truths, and do as he shall see fit about practising upon them; or he may reduce them to practice, without denying himself any sinful indulgence that he loves. But not so with the Bible. Such are the subjects of which it treats, that the man who admits its truth feels bound to acquaint himself with its contents; and he who learns what its requirements are, feels bound to obey them; and obedience to them consists in abstinence from the pleasures of sin, and in the performance of duties which those who love such pleasures dread. In Christian lands, every one knows this,—knows that if the truth of the Bible is admitted, there is left no resting place for his conscience, short of thorough obedience to its teachings. Here is the temptation to call it false or doubtful. The grossest sensualist, even, may admit Euclid, and continue as undisturbed as ever in his

sensuality; but if he once admits the Bible, he must abandon his revels, or bear the continual goadings of conscience. He cannot consent to do either, for he loves the one and is afraid of the other; and for this reason, and for this only, he endeavors to escape from both by resolutely adhering, in despite of evidence, to the creed which promises him peace in sin—to infidelity. He is an infidel, because he is a bad man, and is unwilling to become better.

But on this point we need not enlarge. The volume before us does it ample justice, and we will no longer detain the reader from its perusal.

SERMONS

ON

INFIDELITY.

SERMON I.

HEBREWS, III. 12.

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”

THE “unbelief” spoken of in the text refers to the religion of Christ. And the Hebrew converts were warned against it by the Apostle, on the ground that, if they cherished such unbelief, they would apostatize not merely from Jesus of Nazareth, but from God himself. God was as much the author of Christianity as he was of Judaism. To each of them he had assigned its place in the great scheme of his moral administration. And he had given abundant reason for embracing the former as a system, which, besides being true and important in itself, was intended to supersede and abrogate the latter. So that if

they rejected it, and went back to their ancient faith, they might be said with perfect propriety to abandon both of them, as to all enlightened and practical allegiance to Him from whom both of them had proceeded, and who still lived, equally just and powerful, to punish their desertion of the new dispensation, as he punished those who despised the promises, and trampled on the authority of the old.

The principle which is here laid down extends farther than the case of the Hebrew converts. It applies with equal force to the case of all those who renounce Christianity, whatever be the religious creed which they profess to adopt or to retain. There is a natural connexion between the disbelief of Christianity in particular, and the disbelief of religion in general. The one leads directly to the other. And therefore to every one who may feel himself tempted to abandon the Gospel as a "cunningly devised fable," or to regard it as unworthy of any great sacrifice, or of any strong attachment, I would with all earnestness address the admonition of the text, and enforce it by the consideration, that your unbelief as to the doctrine of Christ will be followed by your departure "from the living God."

The position we have laid down may give offence to those who go no farther than a rejection of the Gospel, as an imputation against their understanding or their integrity. It may be stigmatized by free-thinkers, as an expression of bigotry and intolerance. And it may be thought uncandid by such as would give credit to the bitterest enemies of revelation, for every degree of faith

which they may pretend to cherish. It is far, however, from being gratuitous or unsupported. And, as it appears to us to be of great importance, we shall state the grounds upon which we apprehend it to be immoveably established.

I. In the *first* place, we appeal to the history of Deism, as it is to be found in the writings of those who have embraced and supported that system.

It is worthy of remark, that the term *Deist* is not of an older date than the middle of the sixteenth century. The class of unbelievers who now assume this appellation, were till then denominated *Atheists*. And it was to avoid the odium attached to that name, that they arrogated the less forbidding and less alarming title by which they afterwards chose to be distinguished. Nor is there the least reason to believe that, when they were accused of being *Atheists*, the accusation had its origin either in mistake or in calumny; or that, when they substituted a milder term, they had any other view than that of bettering their reputation, by pretending to hold principles of which they were known to be destitute. On the contrary, it is a recorded and undeniable fact, that though they put on this mask, and deceived such as contemplated them at a distance—though they professed to admit the existence of a God, and though some of them professed to go a step farther, and admit the immortality of the soul—they were, nevertheless, in the habit of laughing at *all* religion as the dream of folly, or of reprobating it as the offspring of fraud and priestcraft.*

* See the article *VIRET*, in Bayle's Dictionary.

That the same thing prevailed among the unbelievers of a later period, we learn from the testimony of one of their own number, given in the most explicit manner, and in the most interesting circumstances. This person* came to be convinced of his errors; and was anxious to do good to those from whom he had found it necessary to separate himself. With that view, he took the trouble of composing a manual for their use, the chief part of which was occupied in defending the great principles of natural theology, because he found them inimical to these, or doubtful of them, and because this aversion constituted one of the most formidable barriers to their reception of the Christian faith.

Numerous examples of the same thing are to be found in the writings of those who have held the most conspicuous place in the ranks of infidelity. We observe them not only amid their occasional professions of respect for Christianity, throwing out against it the language of ridicule and condemnation, but even in their avowed attempts to build up a theory of pure Deism, intentionally leaving out, or speaking lightly and contemptuously of some of the most essential principles of all religion. Whether they were allowed to fall into these aberrations by the inherent inconsistency of their system, or whether they were forced into them by the natural course and current of their argument, it is of no consequence to ascertain. The fact, with which alone we have to do at present, is sufficiently certain, that they have not scrupled to cast away as neither useful nor true, the doctrines of

* Mr. Gildon, author of "The Deist's Manual," which was published about the beginning of the 18th century.

God's holiness and justice, of a superintending providence, and of a future retribution.

Nay, it is to be particularly noticed, that those individuals among them who have brought most intellect into the controversy, who seem to have possessed the finest talents for asserting the sufficiency and proving the tenets of natural religion, and whose opinions have been most frequently and submissively appealed to by the enemies of Christianity, are the very men by whom Christianity and natural religion have been treated with an almost equal degree of indifference or dislike. If natural religion has appeared to be the object of their respect, and has experienced their support, it was only that, by alleging its sufficiency, they might give the deadlier blow to the faith of Jesus. But there is not a truth in the one or in the other which they have not exposed to ridicule by their profane wit, or brought into question by their ingenious speculations. And though they have not had the hardihood to avow themselves the supporters of Atheism, yet it is impossible to peruse what they have published without perceiving, that to Atheism we must come at last, if we acquiesce in their positions, and follow out the course which they have pursued.

We would not impute to any set of men one dogma which they have plainly and honestly disavowed. We are too much aware of the weakness of the human understanding, and of the errors and inadvertencies to which it is liable in the breasts of the ablest and the best, to be guilty of such a want of candor and forbearance. And we should hold it to be unjust, to make one of them accountable

for the statements of another, which he has neither sanctioned nor acknowledged. All that we are desirous to establish is, that infidels have not been contented with merely laying aside Christianity as unnecessary for the condition of man, or as unsupported by satisfactory evidence ; but that they have been equally careless of retaining certain tenets, which every one must regard as of vital importance to the harmony and the utility of the least complicated form of religion. And of this, their declared sentiments furnish us with the most ample and unequivocal demonstrations. And surely the fact is of the greater weight, when we recollect that it is not peculiar to those authors whose authority has been held in little respect, and has possessed little influence over the opinions of others, but that it marks the writings of individuals who yield to none of their brethren in professions of sincerity, in literary and philosophical acquirements, or in the estimation in which they have been held by the abettors of infidelity, and by the world at large.

It is no very difficult matter, indeed, to get up a theory of pure Deism. Such a thing has not only been attempted, but accomplished. But by whom has it been accomplished? Not by infidels, but by believers in Christianity. And these have succeeded just because they *were* believers in Christianity. They have flattered themselves, perhaps, that they were following the mere light of nature, when in truth they were walking in the broad daylight of Revelation. They had all the materials for their scheme already laid to their hand. They had nothing to do but to separate them from what is peculiar to the Gospel as a message of pardon

—and to arrange them into something like systematic order—and to annex to them some portion of argument and illustration. In fact, they have been careful never to travel out of the record. They have been restrained by their previous and settled belief in the authenticity of the Bible. Or they have been afraid of yielding to the scepticism which a momentary and formal departure from the solid ground of Revelation was beginning to engender in their minds. And accordingly they have put down nothing which was not already put down for them by the pen of inspiration; nor have they employed any reasonings but those which, however inconclusive as to the matter in hand, may at least be quite safe in their remoter bearings on other departments of the system. But where is such a scheme to be discovered in the productions of those who have rejected Christianity? Have they ever pretended to put together a platform of natural religion, which is repugnant in none of its parts to the dictates of revelation on that particular branch of theology? Or, have they ever pretended to maintain it by arguments, whose legitimate effect is not hostile to some of their own conclusions? Yes: they have pretended such things, and they have tried them—but without success. In all those systems which have been framed by such of the Deists as not only denied the truth of Christianity, but scorned to receive any aid from it, we observe some of the fundamental principles of religion deliberately and decidedly rejected, or abandoned to doubts as fatal to their practical efficacy as an absolute denial of them.

The history of Deism, indeed, presents us with a case which may seem to form an exception to our general statement on this part of the subject. One of its votaries* did contrive to give a view of the religion of nature, which is wonderfully consistent and free from gross imperfections. But then, it is evidently borrowed from the sacred Scriptures, with which he was acquainted, and to which he expressly refers as a source of information. So far as he endeavors to support it by reasoning, he himself acknowledges that his induction of particulars is incomplete; and it is obviously so, to a much greater extent than he was willing to allow. And, what is of still higher consequence, comparatively excellent and perfect as his scheme was, it has scarcely procured him a follower among the multitude of Infidels that succeeded him. Most of them, indeed, have set it aside, as abridging that latitude of free-thinking by which they wish to be distinguished; and instead of supplying its deficiencies and correcting its mistakes, which the pretensions of Deism would have led us to expect, they have gradually declined from the high ground on which it had placed them, and sunk into the lowest depths of scepticism and infidelity.

There is nothing, perhaps, which is more deserving of notice in the conduct of the deistical unbelievers, or which can more forcibly strike a serious reader, or which contributes more to the result we are aiming at, than the perfect ease, and not seldom the self-complacent levity, with which they lay

*Lord Herbert. See his Treatises "De Religione Gentilium" and "De Religione Laici."

down their principles and speak of their conclusions. They expunge an attribute from the character of God; or they contend against the belief of his government of the world; or they blot out immortality from the record of human hopes; or they reduce it, from being the great scene of moral retribution, to a mere picture of the fancy—they do this, not only without one sigh of regret, and without one feeling of compunction, but with as much coolness as they would rectify an error in the most common transactions of life. They talk, indeed, of their reverence for sacred truth; but they can put forth the hand of no ordinary daring upon the mighty perfections of Jehovah, and the eternal prospects of our race, with less ceremony than they would employ in settling the personal merits of an earthly friend, or in deciding upon the commercial enterprizes of the humblest citizen. They seem even anxious to shew, by some decisive proof of independence, that they are not under the trammels of the bible, and have, therefore, no hesitation in denouncing as superstition and falsehood, certain of the positions which it contains, on that more limited scheme of theology within which they profess to confine their speculations and their faith. And, in this manner, while they have exhibited the fact, in its most indisputable form, that unbelievers have never afforded us a full and consistent view of the religion of nature, but have left out one or other of its fundamental doctrines; they have, at the same time, betrayed a spirit which is ready to regard them all with indifference or contempt, which would be more in its natural element, the more it receded

from any connexion, or from any contact whatever with the system of Christianity, and to whose wanderings, therefore, we feel it impossible to assign any limits on this side of speculative or practical atheism.

II. In support of our proposition, we appeal, in the *second* place, to the prevailing infidelity of the day, of whose character and features every one must judge, so far as it has come within his knowledge, or presented itself to his observation.

We have spoken of those unbelievers who have published their sentiments; and if, when they were deliberately committing themselves to the world, and, in a permanent record of their opinions, giving over their reputation to the judgement of their contemporaries, and handing it down for the decision of posterity—if, with this responsibility hanging over them, they departed so far from the living God, and wandered in the paths of general irreligion, to what lengths may not we expect the many to go, who have no such restraints upon them, either in forming or in declaring their sentiments? What can we expect, but that having a greater latitude for their unbelief, their unbelief will take a wider range—that they will speak more freely than they would have written—and that, in the tone and complexion of their character, they shall give sufficiently intelligible tokens of their having a still more reckless infidelity in their minds than they have courage to avow? And this is just the fact which is realized in every corner of the unbelieving world. Infidelity puts on a great variety of aspects; it dres-

ses itself in a thousand garbs; its appearance is diversified by colors and shades as numerous almost as the individuals by whom it is exhibited. But there is one leading feature which it never loses, and which pervades the whole of those to whom it attaches, and shews them to be members of the same family—a feature of determined hostility, or of settled contempt, for what is sacred—not merely for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but for all that relates to the belief and the service of the living God.

We have heard, indeed, of men who affected to hold fast by the tenets of natural religion, while they repudiated those of divine Revelation; but we have never been so fortunate as to see and converse with one of them whose creed, select, and circumscribed, and palatable as he had made it, seemed to have any serious footing in his mind, or any practical influence on his life; who could restrain his sneer at piety the most untinged with enthusiasm; or who could check his speculations, however hostile to the system he had affected to embrace; or who worshipped the God in whose existence and attributes he acknowledged his belief; or who acted with a view to that immortality, for which he allowed that the soul of man is destined.

It is true, the votaries of infidelity are often placed in circumstances which constrain them to hold such language, and maintain such a deportment, as by itself might indicate the presence of Christian principle. They are frequently not at liberty to give that full play and that unreserved publicity to their unbelief, in which, however, it is

naturally disposed to indulge, and in which it would undoubtedly manifest itself, were it free to operate at large. And you may not, therefore, at particular times, and in particular situations, perceive any marked distinction between them and the devoted followers of Jesus of Nazareth. They may find it prejudicial to their worldly interests, or to their good name, to make an open avowal of any approach, however distant, to the confines of atheism. They may have a family, and in the tenderness of parental affection, and with the conviction that what they regard as altogether false may contribute as much to the virtue and happiness of their children as if it were altogether true, they may shrink from any declaration of infidelity within the domestic circle. They may acknowledge in the season of their own distress, or they may suggest, amid the distresses of their friends, those considerations to which the mind, when softened or when agitated by affliction, naturally clings, even though it has no habitual conviction of their truth, and no proper title to the consolation which they afford. They may be driven by bodily anguish, or by impending danger, to utter the language of a piety which till that moment was a stranger even to their lips, just as the mariner has been known, amidst the perils and horrors of a shipwreck, to cry for mercy from that God whose existence he had never before confessed, but by his profaneness and his blasphemies. Or they may even be strongly and insensibly induced to accommodate themselves to prevailing customs, and to pay an outward homage to the faith of the New Testament, by occasionally attending its in-

stitutions, though they are all the while regarding it as a mere harmless fable, if not as a contemptible or a pernicious superstition.

But look at them, when placed in those circumstances which put no such restraints upon what they may say and do as the enemies of Christianity ; observe them when the pride of intellect tempts them to display their learning or their ingenuity in contending against the vulgar faith—or when they have a passion to gratify, which needs the aid of some principle to vindicate its indulgence—or when they have nothing to fear from giving utterance to what they think and feel—or when they happen to be associated with those among whom the quality of free-thinking prevails ; observe them as to the language which they employ, and the practice which they maintain with respect to religion, in the ordinary course and tenor of their lives ; and then say what positive proofs they give you of the reality or of the efficacy of those religious principles which they profess to have retained, after putting away from them the doctrine of Christ. Say, if instead of affording you positive proofs of such remanent and distinctive piety, they are not displaying daily and inveterate symptoms that God, and Providence, and immortality, are not in all their thoughts. Say, if you have not seen many a melancholy demonstration of that general irreligion, which we have ascribed to them as the consequence of their throwing off the dominion of the Gospel. And say if you have not been able to trace this down through all the gradations of infidelity, from the speculative philosopher, who has

decided that there is no Saviour, till you come to the fool, who says, in the weakness and the wickedness of his heart, that there is no God.

In reply to this, we shall probably hear it alleged, that there may be religious principle and religious feeling where there is no religious display—that those are not always the most devout, whose devotion makes the most noise, and attracts the most notice—that the theology of nature being much simpler than the theology of revelation, it is not capable of being evidenced by such marked and decisive symptoms.

But we are not to be satisfied with such allegations. When those who reject Christianity take refuge in the doctrine and habits of Quietism, and pretend to the exercises of inward contemplative piety, in order to save themselves from the charge of utter infidelity, we do not think it necessary to follow them into their retreat with any thing in the shape of argument, or to disturb their repose even by a single observation. If they mean to defend their cause by referring to the sanctimoniousness and hypocrisy of mere nominal Christians, we take away their defence by giving up to them these traitors as their own allies, and acknowledging that whenever we shall build upon such a hollow foundation, they are at liberty to overthrow our superstructure, and to erect their system upon its ruins. And, so far as the general principle of their allegation is concerned, we maintain that it has no force nor weight in it. For if the doctrines of natural religion be cordially admitted, they cannot but be accompanied with some external tokens of their reception and their influence.

They may be prevented, by various circumstances, from producing all the effect which might be wished or expected; but there will be such manifestations of them, as to leave no room for doubting that they are the objects of belief. In the conversation and the conduct, there will be a plain recognition of God's existence, and of his perfections, and of his government of the world, and of a future state of retribution. And all this we shall confidently expect to find in the case of those, who deliberately separate between the religion of nature and the religion of Jesus; who have discarded the latter as a fable, and who have adhered to the former as a system of doctrine purified from error and superstition, and arrayed in all the majesty of unquestionable and eternal truth. But can it be pretended that such things are realized in the character of infidels; or that they are realized to such an extent as can disprove our position? Where shall we find among infidels any thing approaching to a demonstration, or even amounting to a presumption, that their minds have kept fast hold of the general principles of religion, after having thrown off the authority of the Gospel? Do not we hear in the language, and do not we see in the conduct, of the uneducated class of unbelievers, the most shocking evidences of a total disregard of every thing of a sacred kind? Among their more learned and philosophical brethren, although there may be fewer practical proofs of the fact, can we fail to discern, along with their avowed rejection of Christianity, numerous and unequivocal traces of indiscriminate, universal, reckless scepticism? And as to those of the fraterni-

ty who pretend not to the intellectual attainments of the latter, and are superior to the former in rank, and circumstances, and influence, while they talk of revelation with almost undisguised contempt, do not they at the same time live without any actual acknowledgment of God as their Governor and Judge ; or, if they make any such profession, is it not obviously and undeniably a mere accommodation to surrounding prejudice, as they would term it ; or a mere employment of that which they neither love nor believe themselves, as a political engine for the management and subjugation of others ?

When, in answer to the statements we have just made, it is charged upon us that we advance them without proof, we can only cast ourselves upon the judgment of every man of candor and observation. We pretend not in a case of this kind, to adduce such evidence as would be required in a court of law. We cannot specify all the individual instances which have led us to our general conclusion. Nor do we ask any one's assent to it, except in so far as the facts to which we have referred have come within the sphere of his own knowledge. If you say that the representation we have given does not accord with what you have actually noticed, we do not insist upon your being influenced by it, and we do not urge it upon you as any ground of argument at all. But we request that you would look around you on the unbelieving world, and examine whether its aspect corresponds with the allegation we have brought forward. And if you find such a correspondence existing, we then expect that you will admit the

point as sufficiently substantiated, and that you will allow it its due weight on your decision of the subject we are discussing.

And what is the precise bearing of the fact on the position we are endeavoring to establish? We do not say that it puts the truth of that position beyond controversy; but we certainly have a right to say, that, taken in connexion with what is presented to us by the history of Deism, it affords a strong presumptive proof of our doctrine. Since those who have rejected Christianity have almost invariably fallen into a disregard of all religion, it is unquestionably fair and rational to infer, that the one species of infidelity naturally leads to the other. If this be not granted, we are at least entitled to call for a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon; and, till that explanation be given, we cannot help regarding and employing it as the foundation of an argument altogether legitimate, and not easily resisted, and beseeching those on whose belief the religion of Christ has begun to lose its hold, to consider well before they proceed farther, what is the probable termination of that course on which they have entered. They may not be convinced by this that the Gospel is true; but it may serve to arrest them, till their understanding has taken a more comprehensive, a more unprejudiced, and a more accurate view of the evidences by which that system is supported, and to make them look with a reasonable degree of jealousy and suspicion on those attempts which, limited as their apparent object may be, are calculated in their ultimate tendency to endanger all the faith and all the hope of those upon whom they are made.

SERMON II.

SAME TEXT.

III. We now appeal, in the *third* place, to the objections which have been urged against Christianity, and upon which Deists have mainly rested their rejection of it.

These, when properly estimated, and impartially applied, will be found to bear as strongly against *natural*, as they do against *revealed* religion. And, consequently, those who are influenced by them, and would act with any degree of consistency, must go the length of renouncing both.

Unbelievers have objected to Christianity, on the ground of its being mysterious. They refuse it their assent and their acceptance, because it contains what they cannot comprehend. But if that be a good reason for rejecting revelation, it is an equally good reason for rejecting all religion. Is there nothing mysterious in the idea of a Being who was the cause and beginning of all things,

and yet was himself without beginning or cause? Is there nothing mysterious in the idea of a Being, who is not extended as matter is, and yet is every where present in all the perfection of his nature? Is there nothing mysterious in the idea of that Being, as infinitely holy and infinitely powerful, and yet allowing sin to enter and to prevail in the world which he governs? In these and many other respects, the religion of nature contains the most perplexing and unintelligible mysteries, and is, therefore, just as fit to be renounced as revelation. Nor should we stop here: we should, agreeably to the same maxim, discredit the most obvious facts in the natural world; for there is not a single object on which we can fix our eyes, that does not contain in it some inexplicable mystery. We see and know these objects to exist, and we perceive their properties, and can perhaps trace their composition; but the mode of their existence is a secret, which to our finite minds is, and will probably remain forever, utterly inscrutable.

Another objection which infidels bring against the Christian faith, is its want of universality. Though it has existed, they say, for seventeen or eighteen centuries, it is still confined to a small portion of mankind; whereas, had it been from God, it would have been communicated to all. But if this objection have any force at all, it must go much farther than Revelation. It may bring suspicion upon Christianity, but it must wholly overturn and annihilate the pretensions of the religion of nature. For Christianity has evidently a footing in the world—it has made a certain pro-

gress—and it is daily advancing towards universality. But where is the religion of nature to be found, except in the alleged capacity of man to discover it, or in the mouths or writings of those who borrow its doctrines from holy writ? Thousands of years have passed away, and still there is not a tribe upon the face of the earth where it can be said to prevail in its genuine form. Nay, among the heathen, instead of there being any approach to it, there seems to be a gradual departure from every thing that is pure and rational in its theory. And had it not been for the doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth, there is every reason to believe that the religion of nature would have been supplanted and superseded by the grossest and most unlimited paganism.

Christianity has also been objected to by infidels, on account of the controverted nature and consequent uncertainty of its articles. But surely it requires no depth of sagacity to perceive, that this objection may, in the hands even of a feeble adversary, be employed to induce universal scepticism; and that, indeed, if it is good for any thing, it must carry us on to Atheism itself,—for what tenet of the Deist's creed has not been positively denied, and which of his reasonings may not be ingeniously disputed? On this point it is a most instructive fact, that though he who first reduced the objection to shape, and gave it prominence in the opposition made to the Gospel, brought forward a system of natural religion, which he deemed so unexceptionable as to secure the acceptance and belief of every man, yet its most important truths have been doubted by some, and de-

nied by others—doubted and denied even by those, who have, notwithstanding, taken up his objection as a good one, and maintained it as sufficient to justify the rejection of Christianity.

But the great objection, on the strength of which unbelievers chiefly found their opposition to Christianity, is, that it implies what is *miraculous*. And so it does: that is a distinguishing property of Revelation; and it is upon that ground, and upon no other, that its truth is established.

But what then? A miracle in itself is nothing but a fact. It is one of the operations of providence. It holds its place among the various and multiplied events which present themselves to the attention of mankind. And, in this point of view, it is just as capable of proof as any other fact, operation, or event, which happens in the world. It comes under the cognizance of those very senses, which witness the existence and the movements of all the different objects in creation; and any one who is competent to convey to us his impression of the one, must be equally competent to convey to us his impression of the other. He simply tells what he saw and heard in both cases. For example, he saw a man die, and he saw the same man rise from the dead. Between these two things, so far as mere physical fact is concerned, there is not the shadow of difference. And there can be no difference in the possibility of the witness testifying what he observed in the latter instance, as well as what he observed in the former. But on this principle, revealed religion and natural religion are on precisely the same footing. Those who saw the miracles of Christ, inferred

from these the truth of his mission and of his doctrine. And upon what other or more favorable ground do they stand, who see the ordinary phenomena of nature and the ordinary course of providence, and from these infer the tenets of Theism? Each of them embraces an inductive argument. Certain ascertained facts are combined with certain acknowledged first principles; and these conduct the understanding to certain conclusions, in which it rests as sound and irresistible.

The cases, indeed, may be thought dissimilar, in so far as the Christian miracles are not personally witnessed by the great majority of those, who yet believe the system which they are intended to support. But the dissimilarity is more seeming than real. For,

1. In the *first* place, natural religion itself must be proved in a great measure by facts, which we receive upon the evidence of testimony. It requires an extensive and minute acquaintance with the works and the ways of God, to enable us to proceed much farther in our conclusion than his mere existence and power. And this acquaintance is to be obtained from the researches, and observations, and experiments of others, a thousand times more than from any exertions of our own. For all the illustrations which are afforded us of the character and government of the Supreme Being, by the discoveries of physical science and the moral and political history of our species, we must be indebted, in no inconsiderable degree, to the very same channels which have conveyed to us an account of the supernatural

events upon which we repose our faith in the religion of Jesus.

2. In the *second* place, it is not strictly true that the Christian miracles are all set before us by testimony. We maintain, that some of them are as much the objects of immediate observation as any appearance whatever in the natural world. The *internal evidence* of the Gospel, like every other branch of its evidence, is miraculous. The Gospel is a work above the power of man; it bears upon its face, and carries in its bosom, the impress of divinity; we see it with our own eyes, and *seeing*, we believe. There is also the *experimental* evidence. We feel in our hearts the operation of the Gospel, producing effects to which the power of man is inadequate, and which, from their nature and extent, we are necessitated to trace to a divine source. And similar effects, exhibited in the character of thousands around us, who have been brought from darkness to light, are visible and striking manifestations of the same heavenly influence by which we ourselves have been transformed. Under this head, we may also include the present state of the Jews, which some Deists have admitted to be at least a most wonderful and inexplicable phenomenon in the history of the world. The predictions respecting them are contained in the Gospel record; and the fulfilment of these predictions is to this day exhibited before us in the character and condition of that singular people—thus not simply proving to us, that he who foretold these things was a true prophet, but also in connexion with the prophesy, actually presenting to our view a miraculous interposition of the power and agency of God. It

is essential indeed to the completeness of the miracle, that we go back to the New Testament annals; but the substance of the miracle—that in which its force properly consists, is an existing fact, seen and known of all men.

3. And then in the *third* place, while *natural* religion is supported in a certain degree by the evidence of testimony, and *revealed* religion, in a certain degree, by the evidence of sense and consciousness, it is to be remarked, that, after all, our belief in either of them is the result of a process of reasoning. The facts with which we are furnished, whether it be by testimony or by sensation, are but the grounds of argument—the mere materials with which we are to work—the means by whose aid we arrive at our conclusions. Now it is a principle of our intellectual constitution, to give credit to human testimony, as well as to give credit to the information of our senses. And though, when these two instruments of knowledge come into competition, we cannot help giving the preference in point of certainty to the latter, yet there is nothing either uncommon or irrational in being satisfied of the validity of both, and in having our judgement determined as much by the one as by the other. It cannot be denied, that there is often as little doubt in the mind respecting the reality of an event, or the existence of a place, when we have merely been told of them, as there is when we have actually seen them. And we do not think it is going too far to say, that the process of induction in the case of Christianity is much simpler, and much less liable to mistake, and much better

fitted for issuing in unequivocal results, than the process of induction which must be gone through in the case of natural religion. The general foundation of our reasoning is the same. We have testimony and observation for the miraculous facts which are adduced in favor of Christianity; and we have testimony and observation for the ordinary facts on which natural religion is built. But miracles, from their very nature, carry a much readier, and clearer, and more irresistible conviction to the mind, than ordinary facts can possibly do. In the latter case the argument is much more abstruse than it needs to be in the former. And when we have once established the truth of the Christian record, we have at the same time, and by necessary consequence, established the truth of every particular doctrine which it contains; whereas there is not a single point in the religion of nature, which does not require a train of reasoning peculiar to itself,—for its discovery, or for its confirmation. It is probably owing to these circumstances, that, in point of fact, incomparably more have been convinced by the evidence for Christianity, of its being the workmanship of God, than were ever convinced or made religious by the mere study of creation, and the mere light of nature.

But then we are told that miracles are incapable of proof, because we have no experience *for* them, and all our experience is *against* them. This is the argument employed by the ablest and acutest of the deistical philosophers: and it has been commonly accounted the strong hold of infidelity. And yet, were it admitted, it would not

only prove destructive of natural religion, as well as of revealed, but of all confidence in history, and of the progress of human knowledge and improvement in every thing but in that which we ourselves had personally and individually witnessed. The power, and greatness, and wisdom of God, are proved from the works that he has made; and the extent, and the magnificence, and the arrangement, and the adaptation of these works, are the facts from which we draw our belief and our admiration of his perfections. Now, of these facts we have, comparatively speaking, and with a few exceptions, no experience. For example, we have no experience of the vast wonders that have been descried by the telescope, nor of the minuter wonders that the microscope has been instrumental in discovering, nor of that fine and admirable mechanism which the skill of anatomists has found to exist in the animal frame, nor of the multifarious indications of contrivance and wisdom which the botanist has detected throughout the whole of the vegetable world. We have been informed of these things by others; we have credited the report which others have given us; and we have reasoned from what they have told us with as much confidence as if we ourselves had been the original observers. But, according to the principle we are considering, all this is wrong; and we should receive none of these things as true, and make none of them the foundation of our reasoning, till they become the subject of our own experience—till we shall have gone through a full course of astronomical observation, and chemical experiment, and physiological scrutiny, and, in short, seen every

thing in the universe with our own eyes. The absurdity of this is so obvious as to require no exposure. We every day believe a thousand things for which we have no corresponding examples in our experience. And were we to attempt to act otherwise, we should contradict the first principles of our rational nature, and put an end not only to religion, but to all science whatever.

The last refuge to which unbelievers have fled on this subject, is a denial of the *possibility* of miracles altogether. But if they deny the possibility of miracles, what becomes of the attribute of omnipotence, which natural religion ascribes to God? Certainly, the Being who created the universe can control all its movements, and do with every department of it as it seemeth good in his sight. And if we deny his competency to suspend the laws which he has established in the natural world, when that may not only be expedient, but be absolutely necessary for making his will known to mankind, we do nothing less than derogate from the perfection of his nature, and call into question his almighty power. His original formation of the earth and the heavens, was as substantially miraculous as any of the miraculous events of the New Testament. So is his upholding the system in being, and order, and beauty. And we may as well deny his ability to send rain for fertilizing the ground, to which purpose it is appointed in the *material* world, as deny that he can empower a human being to perform miracles, in order to accomplish some important purposes in the *moral* world. It is strange, indeed, that Deists should question God's prerogative to dis-

pense with the arrangements which he himself has made, and deny the possibility of a miracle subsequent to the creation, which was itself the most wonderful of all miracles, and which forms an essential article in their creed as believers in the religion of nature, no less than it does in our creed as believers in the religion of Christ.

IV. We appeal, in the *fourth* place, to the nature of those causes of infidelity which are not connected with any reasoning on the evidences of Christianity, or on the soundness of the objections brought against it.

It may here be remarked in general, that whenever the cause of rejecting Christianity is something different from a conviction, whether enlightened or mistaken, of its being an imposture, it is vain to look for any abiding principles of religion. There is in that case no discrimination made between the things that are presented for consideration, so that one thing may be retained while another is rejected, and a *wherefore* distinctly assigned for the difference of treatment which they receive. Were the judgement to be exercised in this manner, we can easily see it possible, that one particular form of religion might be laid aside by some individuals, who might nevertheless consistently adopt another form. But when the question ceases to respect the real truth or falsehood of the system under consideration, and to hinge entirely on feelings, and views, and circumstances, that are independent of its external evidence or its essential merits, there can be no security for its being embraced under any modification what-

ever. If a man rejects the Gospel from any thing but a belief, produced by reasoning of some kind or another, you have no hold at all on his attachment to religion. It becomes the mere sport of his likings and his dislikings, of his humors and caprices, of his tumultuary passions and his varying interests. In obedience to these, he has thrown away the religion of Christ; and in obedience to these he may also throw away the religion of nature, even though its truth were capable of mathematical demonstration. There is no longer a single doctrine, be it ever so indisputable, and be it ever so dissimilar to the peculiarities of the Christian revelation, to which you can for a moment count, either on the assent of his understanding, or on the homage of his affections.

But, in farther illustration of this point, let us attend for a little to the most prevalent of those causes of infidelity to which we now allude. The most prevalent of them seem to be, Inconsiderateness, Pride of Understanding, and Moral Depravity.

1. And *first*, as to Inconsiderateness. How many are there who have never thought at all on the subject of Christianity, or whose attention to it has been so slight and passing as to be incapable of producing any effect! Ignorant of it, because they have not made it a subject of study, and content to remain in ignorance, rather than be at any pains to inform themselves about its nature and its truth, they cannot fail to be unbelievers. And having been long accustomed to treat it with indifference, they have acquired such a habit of carelessness, that it is almost impossible to bring it under their serious notice for a moment,

or to make them look upon it with the least degree of concern.

But if the religion of *Christ* bespeaks their attention in vain, what probability is there that the religion of *nature* will command it? Does not the former contain all which the latter pretends to teach, and that, in a far higher degree of purity and clearness? While it thus possesses the whole of that claim which the other has on the regards of mankind, has it not an additional claim, derived from the professed purpose and the apparent necessity of its peculiar system? And does not the foundation of this additional claim imply the most forcible and affecting appeal that can be made to the human mind? Is there more—is there not infinitely less—interest in the tenets even of the most unexceptionable scheme of Deism that ever was propounded, than is to be found in the pages of Christianity, which gives all those tenets in their most perfect form, impresses on them the authority of a revelation from heaven, and associates with them the wonders of an everlasting redemption? Is it a more easy or a more inviting task to go through the evidences of *natural* theology, than it is to go through the evidences of *revealed* theology? Will that man be induced to contemplate God merely as the author of nature, whom we cannot prevail upon to contemplate him as a Being that unites with this great character the still more endearing and attractive character of the Saviour of a ruined world? Will he, who refuses to read of the Almighty in that volume which holds itself out as his written word, and speaks of him in language so plain, and yet so

sublime, and gives a delineation of his character and his government which looks as if his own unerring hand had drawn it, consent to be employed in spelling out his name, and his attributes, and his will, in the more obscure and unsatisfactory volume of creation? Will any one be tempted to embrace the doctrines of Providence and Immortality, as discovered by the light of unaided reason, or to apply himself to that process by which the discovery is to be achieved, who has been utterly heedless of these doctrines, when clothed with all the vividness, and pathos, and grandeur, with which they have been depicted by the pen of inspiration?

Let any person, in short, compare the Deist's system with that of the Christian, and say which of them is most likely to affect those principles and susceptibilities of the mind, which, when brought into action, put an end to all indifference on the subject of religion—which of them is fitted to operate most powerfully on the curiosity, the hopes, the fears, the self-interest, the ambition, the gratitude, of those to whose attention they are offered. Let him, then, look abroad among those who may furnish examples of the influence of both, and observe if there be a single instance in which mere theism has roused to serious thought, or converted to practical piety, one individual whose carelessness had been proof against the claims of Christianity. And having thus considered both the merits and the fact, let him determine whether we are not entitled to conclude, that none who reject the Gospel from the cause that we have had particularly in view, can be expected

to stop short of general irreligion, or to retain any thing whatever that deserves a different or a better name.

2. While there are some who reject the Gospel from mere Inconsiderateness, there are others who reject it from Intellectual Pride.

These are to be found chiefly among men of literature and science. They have made, or think that they have made, great attainments in philosophy and learning. And in consequence of this successful cultivation, real or imagined, of their mental faculties, they stand high in the esteem of the world, and they stand still higher in their own. They conceive themselves equal to any undertaking in which they may be pleased to engage. Every thing that is worthy of admission into their creed, they hold to be completely within the reach of their understanding. And in nothing can they brook authority or dictation, so far as it supposes their want of capacity, or controls the exercise of their powers, or tends to lower their consciousness of personal ability. By acquiescing in any thing of this kind, they would feel degraded in their own minds, and would be ashamed to lift up their heads in the presence of their fellows.

Actuated by such a spirit, they perceive in Christianity what determines them against it, without any precise knowledge of its merits, or any accurate inquiry into its pretensions. For aught they know, it may be supported by the most irrefragable evidence. But then it interferes with their previous notions; it often rises above their comprehension; it puts a check on some of

their favorite speculations; it insists upon humbling all their high thoughts, and making all their decisions and convictions unreservedly submissive to what is revealed in the word of God. And on these accounts they repudiate the faith of Jesus, and are even ambitious to take their place in the ranks of infidelity.

Now, it is very obvious that the same thing must happen with regard to natural religion—if natural religion is to be viewed as a fixed and determinate system, whose doctrines, though not supported by that very kind of evidence which is employed to establish the doctrines of Christianity, are yet supported by such evidence as gives the mind a settled conviction of their truth, and are held to be not only demonstrably true, but infinitely more important than any thing else that can become the subject of consideration.

Will not every man perceive at once, that it is full of what we call mysteries;—that it contains a great deal which is incomprehensible to human intellect;—that its very first and fundamental principles are as incapable of being understood and explained as any one dogma within the compass of Revelation;—that there is nothing more revolting to us, as being above the reach of our conception, in such tenets as those of the Trinity, the Atonement, and the Resurrection, than there is in the proposition that there is a Being who is himself without cause, and yet the cause and creator of all things, and that though unextended, he is every where present?

Does it not necessarily interfere with every notion, and does it not necessarily bar every sort of

speculation, which trenches in the least degree on any one of its articles of belief—which can affect their credit, or which can diminish their influence? And are the persons of whom we speak so simple in their notions, and are they so circumscribed in their speculations, as to stop exactly at the line which fences round the religion of nature, comprehending as it does within its wide dominion, both mind and matter, earth and heaven, the history of the past and the anticipation of the future, the world that now is and that which is to come?

Does it not say to every one who embraces it, “Hitherto may you come, but no further; these principles which you have adopted are truly divine, and awfully momentous; they are mysterious, but still you must believe and hold by them: far from harboring any opinion that contradicts or tends to invalidate them, you must subordinate all your faculties and all your wishes to their paramount authority; and when you have indulged in any conjecture, or set up any theory, or come to any conclusion, that stands opposed to them, you have done what is wrong and inadmissible, and you must retrace your steps, and you must keep yourselves strictly within the limits which I prescribe, and patiently submit to the restraints which I impose?”

And are these trammels, I would ask, likely to be endured by men who have rejected the Gospel because it tends to humble their intellectual pride—because it offers to their faith what they cannot fully understand, and sets bounds to their passion for speculation, which it must not pass? If in the exercise of their mental powers they must not be

offended by difficulties which they cannot solve, nor fettered by restrictions which it is unlawful for them to break through, it is not to be wondered at that they dislike and cast away from them the Christian religion; but if the Christian religion be obnoxious to them on such grounds as these, we do not see how it is possible for them to be reconciled to natural religion, or to respect it as a scheme for the regulation of their faith and practice. There is but one way of securing for it any thing like a fixed place in their attachment; and that is, by depriving it of all precision and certainty; by reducing it to a set of vague and indefinite articles, with which they may use the utmost latitude of freedom, and which lose all their sacredness, whenever they stand in the way of some new fancy of their own; and thus, by giving it such an unstable, unmeaning, and uninfluential character, as evidently brings it down to the same level with infidelity itself, and makes it a matter of almost perfect indifference whether those who profess it call themselves Deists or Atheists.

3. But by far the greatest proportion of unbelievers, are so from the influence of Moral Depravity.

This cause operates upon men who know about Christianity, and who reason about it; and it operates upon men who are ignorant of its claims on their assent, and who never think of any argument on the subject.

The former pretend to disbelieve it on principle, while in reality they are infidels because their hearts and deeds are evil; or their impatience,

under its moral discipline leads them to seek for, and thus seeking for, they easily persuade themselves that they find, absurdity in its doctrine, and insufficiency in its evidence. And they discover in the objections brought against it on both grounds, a force and a conclusiveness, of which, in other circumstances, they would have thought them entirely destitute.

The latter are neither acquainted with the Gospel, nor do they study to make themselves acquainted with it. Neither before nor after their rejection of it, have they spent the slightest consideration on what it proposes to their faith, or on the soundness and security of those foundations on which that faith may rest. They are not capable of reasoning, or they will not take the trouble to reason, or they are afraid to reason, on the validity of its pretensions to be a revelation from God, and to be at once the rule of their present conduct and the judge of their future fate. But they know this much of it, that it is altogether holy. They cannot read a page of its record,—they cannot look into any one of its departments—they cannot even hear of it from the most mistaken of its votaries, without perceiving that its spirit and its letter are alike and utterly hostile to “all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men.” They see that it proposes to subject them to a degree of control to which they have not been accustomed, and under which they do not choose to be placed. They are aware that it peremptorily commands them to renounce and to abstain from every vicious indulgence, how-

ever dear and inveterate it may be; to perform many duties to which they feel a strong and insuperable aversion; to make a number of painful sacrifices, in order to preserve such a character as will be acceptable to God; to adopt and adhere to a plan of life wholly inconsistent with that irregular and unbridled course which they have hitherto pursued, and in which their passions and their habits impel them to continue. And they are farther aware, that it not only requires these things, but that it distinctly withholds the promise of a single blessing from those who do not comply with its requirements, and denounces the most awful punishment against every one who does not surrender himself to its guidance and authority. So that to embrace it would be to "cut off the right hand, and to pluck out the right eye," of all on which they set the highest value, and to which they are most vehemently attached. And, resolved to persevere in sinful gratifications, they abandon it, without farther reflection or inquiry, as a yoke of bondage which they are neither able nor willing to bear.

In both these classes, the cause of infidelity is the same. It is the contrariety which subsists between the moral character of the gospel, and the moral character which they are determined to maintain. It is that the Gospel requires a practical homage, to which their evil heart, in its inclinations and in its purposes, cherishes a hardened opposition. It is that the practices to which they are addicted, and which they cannot be prevailed upon to forsake, are at irreconcil-

able enmity with every thing which the Gospel holds forth to their contemplation, and with every thing which the Gospel enjoins on their observance.

And surely it is unnecessary for me to say any thing to convince you of the vast extent to which this cause works for the interests of infidelity. A little knowledge of human nature would have led you to anticipate that, of the multitude who would either refuse to accept of Christianity, or who would cast it off after having professed it, the great majority would be carried away by no other motive than their hatred of its pure and righteous law. And you have only to cast your eye over the many who do not believe, to be satisfied from what is actually realized among them, that our Saviour gave the true and general solution of the case when he said, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and that men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

Now, if immorality be thus productive of unbelief with respect to the religion of Christ, it will produce a similar effect with respect to the religion of nature. The moral system of the one is nothing else, as to its general spirit and leading features, than the moral system of the other. We are not aware, at least, of any essential difference between them; nor have we ever seen a rule of life propounded by any of the apostles of deism, which was not principally and obviously borrowed from the Gospel. Nay, the enemies of the Gospel have expressed their admiration of its moral precepts; and it cannot be supposed that

they would do so, unless it were from the conviction that these are the very precepts which are sanctioned and taught by their own peculiar creed.

If indeed deism has a law for the government of human conduct totally dissimilar to that which is enacted in the book of inspiration; if it be, what the latter assuredly is not, friendly to vice and inimical to virtue; if it leave those who have embraced it to the free gratification of their passions and appetites, and insist upon no higher attainments in purity and rectitude than they may find it convenient to make,—then let this be fairly avowed, and we shall take up another line of argument, and by that come more speedily and more effectually to our conclusion. But nothing like this will be maintained. It will be allowed, or rather it is always urged, that natural religion gives no encouragement to vice, but on the contrary, is the friend of moral goodness. And it will only be affirmed that it does not carry its pretensions to strictness so high as Christianity, and that it leaves out of its catalogue of virtues some qualities and actions which Christianity includes. This statement, however, does not alter the case, so long as deism is said to discountenance and interdict the sins to which man feels the strongest propensity, which he is most powerfully tempted to commit, and into which experience shews that he most frequently falls.

In truth, the persons we are now speaking of do not reject Christianity on account of that superior rigidness with which it watches, and directs, and governs those who submit to it. They

have not penetrated so far into its spirit and its maxims. They have never looked up to those loftier eminences of self-denial and heavenly-mindedness and virtue, to which it beckons its disciples, and to which it is fitted to raise them. They have only seen the broader lineaments in which it frowns upon licentiousness and crime; and these are sufficient to keep them at a distance from it, and to render it the object of their unconquerable aversion. It subjects them to a rule which they must not violate; and this, independently of any specific or detailed exhibition of the particulars which the rule implies, is so inconsistent with that impatience of all moral restraint, that desire and resolution to live as they please, that headstrong passionateness and waywardness of disposition by which they are actuated, that they will not and cannot be reconciled to it. It forbids profaneness, injustice, falsehood, cruelty, incontinence, intemperance, idleness, covetousness, strife, revenge, oppression, insubordination; and in its prohibiting one and all of these delinquencies, we find the secret of their relinquishing or disbelieving Christianity. But, surely, having thrown off Christianity on such grounds, it is not to be expected that they will stop short at this stage of unbelief—that natural religion will arrest them in their career—that it can set up such a barrier as will prevent them from passing on to that utter regardlessness of religious and moral obligation, which, by whatever names it may be disguised, amounts to nothing less than substantial and practical atheism. For, according to the

account given of it by its own adherents, it has nothing to gratify their corrupt inclinations. To them it has no allurements, and by them it can be viewed with no affection, so long as it exacts from them the cultivation of holiness, and warns, and rebukes, and threatens them on account of neglecting it. But this we are told is its essential character. The truths which it presents to them, the precepts which it enjoins upon them, and the prospects which it sets before them, are all intolerant of the indulgences, for the sake of which they were displeased with the Christian faith, and put it away from them. Its doctrines are not to be considered as mere subjects for the exercise of an ingenious intellect or of a lively fancy, and which we may think of, and believe in, and talk about, like any topic of elegant literature or of abstract science, without feeling ourselves bound by them to follow any particular course of action. They must all be viewed as connected with the attributes, and as emanating from the appointment, of that great Being who sits upon the throne of the universe; and as conveying to us, in so far as we give credit to them, the intimations of his will respecting our conduct, just as certainly and authoritatively as if they were made known to us by an audible voice from heaven.

In this light it is that natural religion must be regarded by its votaries, if it is to have any meaning and to be of any use in the world. It presents to them a holy God, as their ruler, their witness, and their judge. It inculcates their future accountability to him for the manner in

which they act in the present world. It marks out to them a certain line of conduct which it is their indispensable duty to pursue, and a certain line of conduct which it is their indispensable duty to shun. It promises them no peace nor safety—it assures them of discomfort, and threatens them with punishment, if they do not conform to what they discover from nature and reason and conscience to be the will of the Supreme Being concerning their deportment. And when its abettors give us any thing like a minute account of its requirements, we find it teaching with clearness, and enforcing by its own proper sanctions, such virtues as these—piety, justice, truth, mercy, purity, sobriety, diligence, peaceableness, forbearance, disinterestedness, and good order. But this being the case, can those who are unbelievers from moral depravity be in any measure better satisfied with deism than with the Gospel? Or can it be pretended, that having deserted the latter on account of its opposition to their depraved feelings and habits, they can ever in that respect find any refuge or deliverance in the former? There is no way of supporting such an allegation but by conceding, as we have already hinted, that deism permits those who have embraced it to follow their own desires with little or with no control, and to be virtuous and vicious, as it may happen to suit their views, or to promote their interests. And whenever this concession is made, deism is plainly acknowledged to be a system of mere opinion or of mere profession, which the worthless have recourse to, and which invites

them to have recourse to it, just that they may have a pretext for being altogether irreligious, and for living without God, as they are living without Christ in the world.

Such, we apprehend, to be the natural and necessary effect of abrogating Christianity. Whatever be the grounds on which this is done, it would appear, both from the nature of these grounds and from the aspect which deism has ever assumed, and still presents to us, that the rejection of all religion as an object of grave belief, or as a rule of human conduct, is the inevitable consequence. And for the system which we shall have thrown away, we must lay our account with adopting a system which it is frightful to contemplate even in theory, and whose visitations on the character and condition of the world, it must be terrible, beyond expression, to endure.

But atheism could not long maintain its ascendancy. This volcano of misery and of crime, after pouring forth its terrors on the scene of human life, would become exhausted by its own destructive efforts, and sink into the stillness and the dreariness of a wide-spread desolation. Man is so framed, and society is so constituted, that religion we must have in some form or another. And all the knowledge of human nature with which we are furnished by experience would lead us to expect, that whatever aspect the case might assume at the beginning, it would gradually degenerate and settle into the errors and abominations of heathenism. Christianity rescued us from heathenism, and if we extinguish the light of

Christianity, I see not how we can avoid the inference, that to the darkness of heathenism we must return. This is the final and unavoidable result.

It is in vain to tell us here of our means of improvement being so superior to those which were anciently enjoyed, and of their being a sufficient security against such a degeneracy as that which we have supposed. They may, indeed, prevent any decline in the arts and sciences of human wisdom, and may still be instrumental, not only in perpetuating, but in carrying forward the mere secular civilization of the world. Or they may be employed, as indeed they are with gratifying success, in upholding the existence, and vindicating the purity, and extending the dominion of that system which is contained in a written record, and has the image and superscription of divinity stamped upon it. But when they are applied to the preservation of religion, in the circumstances in which we suppose religion to be placed after Christianity is abolished, they have quite a different task to achieve from that which is assigned to them in the two cases just mentioned. And it is a task to which the history of our race demonstrates them to be totally inadequate.

There might remain among a few of the more enlightened, some occasional glimpses of religious truth, as we find to have been the case in the pagan world. But the degradation of the great mass of the people to that ignorance, and idolatry, and superstition, out of which the Gospel had emancipated them, would be certain and complete. This retrograde movement might be

retarded by the advantages which we have derived from that system, whose influence we should continue to feel long after we had ceased to acknowledge the divinity of its source. But these advantages would, by degrees, lose their efficacy, even as mere matters of speculation, and give place to the workings of fancy, and credulity, and corruption. A radiance might still glow upon the high places of the earth, after the sun of revelation had gone down; and the brighter and the longer it had shone, the more gradual would be the decay of that light and warmth which it had left behind it. But everywhere there would be the sad tokens of a departed glory and of a coming night. Twilight might be protracted through the course of many generations, and still our unhappy race might be able to read, though dimly, many of the wonders of the eternal godhead, and to wind a dubious way through the perils of the wilderness. But it would be twilight still; shade would thicken after shade; every succeeding age would come wrapped in a deeper and a deeper gloom;—till at last, that flood of glory which the Gospel is now pouring upon the world, would be lost and buried in impenetrable darkness.

Now, my friends, the argument which we have been stating and illustrating, unquestionably furnishes no positive or direct proof of the truth of Christianity. It cannot produce this effect, and it has not been employed for this purpose. But still, it may answer two important ends.

In the first place, it may help to guard you against feeling or shewing any indulgence to those

doubts of the Gospel as a system of religious truth and duty, which will sometimes intrude themselves into a reflecting mind. If the rejection of the Gospel is so apt to carry you into general scepticism and infidelity—if the rejection of the Gospel seems necessarily to draw such awful consequences after it, then surely you will not rashly or easily allow your faith in the Gospel to be shaken. You will try every means of satisfying yourselves of its truth, before you consent to give it up as a fable. And you will consider its evidences with that prepossession, as just as it is natural, which arises from finding that it forms your only barrier against an inundation of all the evils and all the horrors of Atheism.

In the *second* place, it may serve to show you what sort of persons they are, who would root out from your minds the faith of Jesus Christ, and for this end are continually plying you with objections, perplexing you with difficulties, and where they cannot reason, endeavouring to laugh you away from the belief and the hope of the Bible. Either they have not considered the subject in all its bearings, and especially are not aware of the effects to be anticipated if their efforts succeed; or, knowing all this, they are reckless of consequences, and care not how immoral or how miserable you become, provided they can exhibit you as trophies to the power of their sophistry and their ridicule. But, in both cases, they are your greatest enemies, while it may be they are in the guise of your greatest friends. On the former supposition, they are incompetent to guide you or to counsel you; for with all their pretensions to

wisdom, they have not the wisdom to inquire or to calculate at what expense you must give away the principles which they are persuading you to renounce. On the latter supposition, they shew themselves to be utterly destitute of those sentiments of regard for your welfare, without which it would be madness to put yourselves under their direction; for if they had the heart to love you, or even the condescension to pity you, they would rather allow you to remain in your delusion of purity, and hope, and happiness, than awaken you to the dreadful realities of guilt, and wretchedness, and despair. Do not therefore listen to their language, which, if it be false, will deceive you to ruin; and which, if it be true, can still secure for you nothing but ruin. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Apply this test—abide by its result—and believing in God ye shall also believe in Christ, who in the experience of thousands is the source of blessings unspeakable, and by whom all who put their trust in him shall be made holy now, and happy for evermore.

SERMON III.

SAME TEXT.

FROM what we have already stated, it appears, that if men were to renounce and abolish Christianity, they would in all probability become atheists in the first instance, and finally return to that Pagan darkness, out of which it had been the work of Christianity to bring them. Such consequences are sufficient to alarm every reflecting mind. They give an importance to the faith of the gospel beyond what is usually attached to it; and should make those who feel any tendency to infidelity, reflect and hesitate long before they give way to that "evil heart of unbelief" with respect to Christ, which leads so directly to a total "departure from the living God."

We shall now consider the subject in a somewhat different light. Supposing the rejection of the gospel to be accompanied with the rejection of natural religion, or with an entire indifference

to it, let us contemplate the effects of this general infidelity, on the conduct and character of those to whom it attaches. In this we shall be furnished with a powerful reason for attending to the cautionary language of the text; for it will be seen that *Infidelity is in every respect hostile to the interests of morality.*

The connexion between principle and practice is obvious and indisputable. The nature of the former, as good or bad, has an influence in imparting the same qualities to the latter. There may, indeed, be occasionally such interferences as to prevent the operation of the one upon the other, or to render its effect less decided and less perceptible. But all that we maintain, is the general fact; and the reality of this cannot be denied with any show of reason or of truth. No doubt there have been men who denied it; for there have been always some ready to deny any thing, the admission of which would condemn a corrupt propensity, or overturn a favorite hypothesis. Some have contended that it is of no moment what we believe, provided our life be good. And the proposition contained in this is so convenient, that it has grown into a sort of proverbial maxim, and is quoted to justify or to excuse opinions, which, if acted upon, must encourage those who hold them, to deviate from the path of rectitude. To such gainsayers, however, we can give no heed: neither their strongest declarations, nor most artful sophistry, can make us discredit the feeling and experience of our own mind; and we have just to appeal, not to the history of mankind at large, but to the recollection, and consciousness,

and conduct, of every individual around us for the truth of our assertion, when we say, that the ordinary course and tenor of a man's actions will correspond with the complexion of those sentiments which he sincerely entertains, and of those doctrines which he conscientiously believes.

Now, Christianity, or true religion, has a direct and powerful tendency to make those who submit to it, morally good. It provides us with a precise and complete rule of duty; and in this respect it has done what no other form of religion, and what no scheme of philosophy, has ever been able to accomplish. But it has done a great deal more; it has furnished us with motives to the cultivation of holiness, the most suitable and persuasive that can possibly be conceived. It addresses itself to all the various powers and susceptibilities of our nature. It operates through the decisions of the understanding, and through the affections of the heart. It speaks to our hatred and our love; to our hope and our fear; to our gratitude and our interest. And in the arguments by which it works upon these, there is a grandeur, and an authority, and a pathos, which no mind can altogether or continually resist. It represents us as placed under the government of that great Being who created and sustains the universe; whose glory is concerned in punishing the rebellious, and rewarding the obedient; and whose piercing eye looks through every corner of the soul, and follows us into our deepest retirements, "beholding the evil and the good." It brings before us, in the work of redemption, such a manifestation of his justice and of his mercy, as is admirably calculat-

ed, on the one hand, to restrain from the excesses of licentiousness and crime, those upon whom the tenderness of a Saviour might have been lavished in vain; and on the other hand, to charm and allure into the very devotedness of virtue, such as would have set their face as adamant against all the terrors of a broken law, and all the majesty of an avenging God. It unfolds to our view a scene of future retribution, the most awful and impressive which imagination can paint,—whose throne is to be occupied by the King of kings; whose transactions are to embrace the character and the fate of every individual of our race; and whose awards are those of immutable rectitude, and stretch into the boundless duration of eternity. And while it thus fences round the interests of moral purity by the magnificent representations of a God who rules over all, and who will bring every thing into judgment, it sets itself to secure them still more minutely, and still more effectually, by never losing sight of its votaries for a moment in the path of life—by directing them in every step they take—fortifying them against every temptation to which they are exposed—administering to them every aid which they require—putting an appropriate check on every evil propensity—presenting a suitable stimulus to every good affection—and making all the doctrines which it reveals, and all the precepts which it enjoins, and all the sanctions by which it enforces them, bear with a sanctifying energy upon every department of the character. So that, making allowance for those imperfections which adhere to every thing that is connected with humanity in its present state, they who have

imbibed its spirit, and conformed themselves to its dictates, must be distinguished by the highest attainments in moral excellence. And that this is the tendency of Christianity, is not only abundantly evident to every one who is acquainted with its nature, but has been explicitly and frequently acknowledged by almost all those who have nevertheless discarded the system itself, as not substantiated by sufficient proof. This is their testimony; and though we do not need it, and would not rest our argument upon it, yet it is valuable as proceeding from adversaries, and may be allowed to put the statement beyond controversy, that true religion is of high importance to the morality of the world.

But infidelity would, of course, annihilate that advantage. It would destroy all the knowledge of virtue, and all the motives to practise it, which are peculiar to the Christian faith. In this proportion it would inflict a certain and unequivocal injury on the great interests of morality. And none who have attended to the subject will venture to say, that the injury would be either slight or unimportant.

The magnitude of the injury, however, is not to be estimated fully, till we have asked and solved the question; When infidelity has taken away the moral influence of religion, what has it left, or what has it substituted, to compensate in any measure for that of which it has deprived us? We will be bold to answer that it has left nothing, and that it can substitute nothing of any consequence. It leaves us to discover for ourselves a rule of life. But that must necessarily

be modified by the influence of caprice, of passion, and of interest; and thus, partaking of the imperfections and errors of those by whom it is formed, it cannot fail to re-act with pernicious effect, and to perpetuate or increase the corruption from which it sprung. And then what paltry and inefficient considerations does it propose, in order to induce men to act a good and honourable part! How paltry and how inefficient, in comparison of those which it has proscribed as the dreams of superstition, or as the devices of priestcraft! It gives us the fear of feeble man, who lives but for a day, for the fear of the mighty and everlasting God. It gives us the good opinion of creatures like ourselves, for the approbation of Him whose favour is pregnant with innumerable blessings. It gives us a regard to the little transitory interests of time, for the prospect of that happiness and glory which is commensurate with eternity. These, and such as these, are the principles by which it would make us holy. But can any one say, or can any one suppose, that they are adequate to the production of such an effect? That they are capable of leading men to any high degrees of virtue? That they are powerful enough to deter or dissuade them even from the lowest vices, or from the most atrocious crimes? No, my friends; if you root out from their minds the conviction that there is a just God who reigns over them, and bring them to believe that when they die they have nothing more to fear or to suffer, it is impossible to say how far they will proceed in criminal indulgence. These mighty fetters being removed, all the other restraints impos-

ed upon their passions would be like the cords with which Sampson was bound, and which, when he put forth his strength, "became as flax that had been burnt with fire."

We are aware, indeed, that the original corruption of human nature is denied. But that is of no consequence to the present argument. As to the cause of the fact that mankind are in a state of depravity, we do not inquire. We do not inquire whether their depravity is inherent and inherited, or whether it is superinduced by bad example, and by the infelicity of outward circumstances. Still the fact is, that there is an evil heart in every descendant of Adam; that this evil heart is the seat of many violent lusts and many wayward propensities; and that these are called into action by a thousand surrounding temptations. And it is not extravagant to affirm that they are not to be controlled and kept within due bounds, by speculations on the intrinsic beauty of virtue, or by a dread of the temporal inconveniences and discomforts of vice, or even by threatenings of the most awful punishments with which iniquity is visited at the hands of men, or by any other, or by all the other means which infidelity can employ to preserve its votaries in the right path. Why, my friends, we see with what difficulty this is effected, even among those who feel the influence of Christianity in all its authoritative and constraining power; how frequently it proves unavailing with them to prevent deeds of enormity; and how generally those who strive to attain, and have actually attained conformity to its law, have to lament the prevalence and the admixture of sin in

their most worthy doings. And what could we anticipate, if this powerful agent in the work of righteousness were taken away, but that iniquity would rush in upon us like a flood? If the torrent is already overflowing, or partially breaking through the strongest and loftiest barriers we can oppose to it, can we be so foolish as to expect that it will be arrested by any feebler obstacle which may be planted in its way? So circumstanced and so constituted is the nature of man, that it needs all the dissuasives from what is bad, and all the incentives to what is good, that can possibly be employed. And to destroy that engine of moral coercion and of moral improvement which is furnished by the Gospel, is not only to prevent its advancement towards perfection, but to secure its degradation beyond the possibility of recovery.

And do not we see this realized among those who have set aside Christianity as a fable, and put away from them all regard to religious truth? Do not we see them violating their moral obligations as often as an allurements presents itself? Do not we see them neglecting the most sacred duties of life whenever it serves their worldly interest? Do not we see them gratifying their unhallowed lusts at the expense of health, and reputation, and fortune? Do not we see them running into excesses of dissipation, or engaging in schemes of injustice, or perpetrating deeds of cruelty, which the more reputable even of themselves would unite to reprobate? We do not say that such is the case in every instance of infidelity. There may be persons who are so constituted, and

so situated, as to be under no great temptation to proceed to those extremities of vice which we have mentioned, or even to exhibit any marked symptoms of immorality. But is not what I have stated the general fact which meets your observation? When you look to individuals—to families—to districts—to nations, that are deeply tinctured with infidelity, do not you find it accompanied with profligacy and crime? From what you have witnessed in such cases, would not you feel yourselves warranted to conclude, that irreligion and immorality have a natural connection with each other among the bulk of mankind? If you wished to encourage virtue, would you not deem it advisable to cherish a sense of religion; or is there any thing else, which, for that purpose, you would substitute in its place; or would you consider it a matter of indifference, whether a sense of religion prevailed or not? On the contrary, whatever you might feel or do yourselves, would not you wish your children instructed in the truths and maxims of Christianity, as the only effectual security for their good conduct? And if you have neglected that point, will not you allow that you have acted the part neither of wise nor affectionate parents? When you see an infidel indulging in licentiousness and sin, is it not the remark which you uniformly make, that his practice is exactly what might have been expected from his principles? When the adept in crime is training up his juvenile pupils to fraud and depredation, is it not his uniform concern to shut out from their view, whatever they may have learned of the fear of the Lord, and of the reverence that is due to

his name, and his sabbaths, and his word? When he desires to lead on his disciples of maturer age and more established habits to deeds of tumult, and rapine, and violence, do not you find him industrious in destroying all their belief in the Bible, and all their respect for the ministers of religion, and all their admiration of every thing that is done for the spiritual regeneration and religious improvement of mankind? And is it not notorious and undeniable, that a great proportion of our unbelievers have become so, and continue so, not because they have reasoned themselves into infidelity, (for of any correct knowledge, or any sober argument on the subject, they are quite guiltless,) but “because their deeds are evil?”—because they are desirous or resolved to live at large, and cannot do so with any consistency, or with any freedom, while the impressions of a holy God, and of a coming judgement, are still reigning in their minds? because they wish to have an apology for their past transgressions, and to have a warrant for future delinquency, and can find these no where but in the system they have fled to, which allows its votaries to act without control, and to sin without remorse? Even in the case of those who can state, with some shew of learning and acuteness, the objections upon which they rest their unbelief, is it not certain that, in most instances, this unbelief originally sprung from impatience under the restraints which Christianity imposed upon their appetites, and that they have become *reasoning* infidels because they were *immoral* infidels? And is it not obvious, that the spirit of their enmity to religion is kindled and kept alive by its absolute

and unbending claims on their unreserved submission to the divine law? And is there not in all this a most decisive proof, that infidelity is essentially and necessarily hostile to moral virtue, and to every thing by which it may be secured and promoted in the world?

But then it is said, in reply to all this, that immoral conduct is as prevalent among Christians as among unbelievers; and our attention is directed to thousands who bear that character, and yet can break all the commandments of the moral law with as little ceremony as if there were not a word of truth in the Bible. In this statement, however, there is a very gross and palpable abuse of terms. We allow that there are many, *professing* to be Christians, to whom the charge is justly and strictly applicable. But then they are not *really* Christians. Christianity does not acknowledge them; and has not got any hold of them; and is not responsible for them. They are mere pretenders. They are infidels in disguise. And sacred as is the garb they wear, it just furnishes an additional evidence of the immoral tendency of infidelity, when we see infidelity breaking through all the decencies which that garb should have imposed, and deliberately trying to cover its impurities and its guilt with the robe of sanctity. This hypocrisy has no more alliance with true religion, than counterfeit money has with the genuine coin. It looks like true religion, and it may pass in the eyes of the simple; or in the reasonings of the sophist, for true religion. But it proceeds from infidelity alone, and it shows how far that system

will carry its votaries in what is base and criminal, and authorizes us as much as any other circumstance whatever, to denounce infidelity as the determined foe of all that is good, and virtuous, and honorable, in human conduct.

At the same time, we do not mean to say that real Christians are either innocent or impeccable. Numerous are the failings, and sometimes aggrivated are the sins, of which they are guilty. But then these are to them the subject of deep regret. They have fallen into them through the infirmity of their nature. It is the object and tendency of their peculiar principles to keep them unspotted from all such pollutions—from every kind, and from every degree, of moral pollution. This too is their constant aim; and every unworthy action they commit, is a departure from the leading design and manifest influence of the faith which they have embraced, and to whose sanctifying power they are nevertheless submissive in the general course and habit of their lives.

Altogether different, however, is the case with infidelity. Whether it is openly avowed, or whether it is concealed under the hypocrite's veil, its tendency and effect go to the destruction of every efficient restraint on the evil passions of our nature, and of every efficient motive to the cultivation of moral purity and excellence; and when those who cherish it in their hearts do not go all the lengths to which it is quite ready to lead them, it is a deviation at once from their system and their practice, and must be attributed to causes which exist independently of it, and which operate in spite of it.

Then it is affirmed, in positive terms, that religion itself has done little for restraining licentiousness and crime—that it has done much less than human laws—that if human laws were not in force, religion would be of no avail, when opposed to the passions and interests of men,—and, consequently, that infidelity cannot be the monstrous evil that we allege. All this has been affirmed. I have read it in books written and circulated for the instruction of our people, and written by the men who boast of their superiority to all prejudice, and with whom “wisdom is to die.” And yet a more superficial or more unfounded allegation was never brought forward in the cause of error.

We grant that religion has not done so much in promoting holiness as we could have desired, or as the consideration of it in the abstract might have led us to expect. But this does not by any means show the inefficacy of religion;—it only shows that religion has not been sufficiently prevalent. It would be no objection to the utility of human laws, to say that they were often violated. And no more is it a valid objection to the utility of religion, that, through ignorance, or perversity, or unbelief, it has failed in a multitude of cases to preserve men in the paths of rectitude and virtue. It is not a compulsory system. It does not by any thing like physical force constrain us to be honest, and sober, and charitable. It adapts itself to the nature and condition of our moral frame; and labors to convince the judgement, and to affect the heart, and in this way to persuade us to abstain from one course of conduct and to follow

another. And this it does with a power of argument, which, upon the whole, must be attended with success ; though, for the reasons already assigned, the practical impression which it produces will in numerous instances be feeble, while in some instances it will produce no practical impression at all.

But it is too much to be told that religion does little or nothing for the virtue of the world, by the very persons whose object it is to check its progress, to impair its authority, to destroy its very existence. The fact which they adduce, supposing it to be as extensive as they affirm, reflects no discredit upon that whose importance they would fain diminish. It is to be traced, in a great measure, to themselves, and to others like-minded, who labour, with but too much success, to annihilate a system that is obnoxious to them, and then complain that the system which they have thus annihilated, is without influence and without advantage. If a remedy has been prescribed, and by terror or by sophistry I prevail upon the patient to refuse it, it is with a bad grace that I quote the agonizing death which ensues, as a proof that the physician is without skill, and that his medicine is without effect.

But, in fact, religion *has* produced a powerful effect in purifying the heart and character of those among whom it has prevailed. Even heathenism, with all its absurdities, and all its imperfections, has exhibited a better character among its votaries than has ever been displayed by the abettors of infidelity, where they have existed in any con-

siderable number, and have thrown themselves entirely loose from the institutions and influence of Christianity. And when we look for the moral triumphs of Christianity itself, are they not recorded in the page of history? Are they not spread over many a country? Are they not every day visible to our eyes, and every moment filling our habitations with peace? What myriads has it been instrumental in reclaiming from vice to virtue—myriads who would otherwise have never found their way out of the wilderness of sin! How many has it brought up from the lowest depths of profligacy! How many, whose character it has adorned with all that is good and great! These have been scattered through the great mass of society; and while they themselves are known and self-declared instances of the moralising power of religion, who can calculate the influence of the good instructions they have given to their children, and of the holy example which they have exhibited to all their multiplied neighborhoods? Religion has a checking and controlling power, even where it is not fully efficacious. There are many of whom we could not say that they are thoroughly pious and good, who have yet such a sense of religion as to be restrained from various practices which they would otherwise be addicted to—who resist temptations to particular sins, and appeal to Christianity as that which prevented them from yielding—who perform certain duties, and who perform them because they know at least that there is a God, and fear that there may be a judgement—who do not cordially believe the doctrine of the cross, and yet in some respects

live above the world, whose dominion they were aware it was intended to destroy. Christianity has raised the tone of moral sentiment, and the standard of moral duty, wherever it has been introduced. Into the great mass of every society that it visits, it carries a leaven of sacred and sanctifying power, which reaches to some who might have been deemed the least capable of being affected by its agency, and which imparts to all a purer and a loftier feeling of the "things that are excellent" than they ever before possessed. Even the more respectable of the infidels themselves, though they may not be sensible of it, or may not acknowledge it, even *they* owe to its indirect influence, in no small degree, their preservation from those more flagrant iniquities into which their system by itself would infallibly plunge them, and their possession of those amiable and respectable qualities which their system by itself has not the remotest tendency to foster. And as to human laws, of whose superiority they have boasted so much, they forget two things, which it is of great consequence to remember. They forget that the best human laws have been founded on Christian principles, and have appealed to the authority and sanctions of the Christian religion for their enactment and their execution, and have been indebted for much of their efficacy to the sense of religious obligation previously existing in the public mind. And they also forget that human virtue does not wholly result from the absence of crime, or consist in that state of conduct which is produced by the mere terror of penal inflictions; but that a great proportion of it is made

up of feelings and actions, which human laws are neither competent nor intended to govern, and which it is the prerogative of religion alone to generate, to foster, and to diffuse.

If our adversaries refer to the commission of *great* crimes, they have not gained their point; for great crimes do not make up the hundredth part of the immorality that abounds in the world. Even in this limited view, however, they are quite mistaken. We doubt not that the fear of ignominious and capital punishments from the hands of men prevents many heinous offences. But we hold that religion does the very same thing in an infinitely greater number of cases: for it reaches incalculably farther than human laws can possibly do. The hope of escape in cases of privacy, for example, may render the latter comparatively inefficient, but it is in the very nature of the former to forbid the formation or encouragement of such a hope. Besides, religion carries its influence to the heart, "out of which are the issues of life," and to all the multitude of petty actions of which the great mass of character is composed. And who can tell the effect which this influence, secret and unperceived, but not the less real and powerful, may produce in arresting the progress of vice in individuals towards the perpetration of aggravated and fatal guilt? Speculative and philosophic infidels may not see this, or they may not think of it: but it is true notwithstanding. The remark is coeval with society, that no man is greatly wicked at once. And it is the exclusive office of religion to check and crush, in the very bud, those vicious propensities, which, if indulged in, (and human

laws cannot prevent their indulgence,) will at length issue in such deadly offences as alone come under the cognizance of human enactments and the lash of human punishments. An illustration of this may be found in the confessions and history of almost all those who have forfeited their lives to the justice of the laws. They began their course by losing sight of religious truth and religious ordinances. Having banished these from their minds and from their practice, they became a prey to every allurements. And from one evil habit they proceeded to another, till the fear of God was entirely gone—till practical infidelity had established its dominion over them, and the denunciations of imprisonment, and exile, and death, from the laws of man, had failed to arrest them in their career of violence and of guilt.

O, but it is urged upon us, that immorality is not always characteristic of infidels; that many of them are eminent for personal virtue, and for all the decencies and charities of domestic and social life; and that this has happened even with such of them as have been most unreserved and most unbounded in their scepticism. In one sense, this may be all true; and yet it is very little to the purpose. We have never denied that some such exceptions are to be met with. But we maintain, that they are *only* exceptions—that they are comparatively few—and that they are owing to circumstances which do not generally exist. They may be found in the case of such as are of cool and sedate temperaments—of such as have recluse and studious habits—of such as have no occasion to encounter the more powerful tempta-

tions of the world—of such as have certain principles and motives peculiar to their situation, which forbid them to do any thing outrageously wicked. And in all these cases, it is quite fair to suppose that the very Christianity which they have discarded, and are endeavoring to destroy, may, by its surrounding prevalence, and its imperceptible efficacy, help to preserve them from those flagrant vices, which infidelity, to say the least of it, does not discountenance or prohibit. But look to the workings of infidelity on the great mass of mankind—of those by whom it has been either partially or wholly embraced. Look to its effects on the young, who are naturally heedless and impetuous;—on those who are exposed to many snares and excitements;—on those who are destitute of the advantages of education;—on those who are not in a situation to be controlled by public opinion;—on those who are away from the sphere in which the light and purity of Christian doctrine may be felt:—look to its effects on these, and you cannot for a moment hesitate to admit its demoralizing tendency;—you must perceive, as by demonstration, that it is the “enemy of all righteousness,” and that, wherever it goes, it may be expected to carry along with it a black and formidable catalogue of crimes.

But we must not be told, even of the infidel philosophers, that because they have not plunged into all the grossness of vice, they are therefore to be quoted as instances of the moral harmlessness of their system. They may be as free from heinous sins as the very purest of Christ’s disciples—they may be just, temperate, honorable—

they may practise all the honesties and all the kindnesses of common life,—and yet, in the very announcement of their unbelief, they indicate a deep-rooted hatred or wanton disregard of virtue, which nothing that they themselves profess, or that their warmest friends can say for them, will either palliate or disguise. The most celebrated of their number have unequivocally confessed the importance of religion to the moral welfare of mankind. But in the very face of this acknowledgement, they have not scrupled to disseminate their opinions against it as widely and as industriously as they could. He who, in point of talent and personal amiableness, may be considered as standing at their head, and of whom another said that he came as near as possible to the idea of “a perfectly wise and virtuous man,” thus expressed himself, in speaking of its being unphilosophical to suppose that the Deity will inflict punishments on vice, and bestow rewards on virtue, beyond what appears in the ordinary course of nature: “Whether this reasoning of theirs be just or not, is no matter; its influence on their life and conduct must still be the same; and those who attempt to disabuse them of such prejudices, may, for ought I know, be good reasoners, but I cannot allow them to be good citizens and politicians, since they free men from one restraint upon their passions, and make the infringement of the laws of equity and society in one respect more easy and secure.” Such was his recorded language; and what was his conduct? Why, to publish the very thing whose tendency he allowed to be unfriendly to the interests of morality, and to labor

with all his genius, and eloquence, and might, to undermine every religious principle that goes to restrain the violence of the wicked, and encourage the virtues of the good. Could there be any love here to good morals?—any virtue in the heart?—any thing but indifference or aversion to its prevalence in the world? No, my friends; we may as well say that the man is not guilty of murder, who has a fatal poison in his possession, but who, instead of taking it himself, circulates it through every corner of the land, while he knows, and believes, and confesses, that it is to slay its thousands and its tens of thousands of unsuspecting mortals.—So much for the morality of infidel philosophers, and so much for the wisdom and the virtue of their “perfectly wise and virtuous men!”

Now, if it be true that infidelity is, in its natural and direct tendency, detrimental to the morality of all who imbibe its principles; if this be the effect which it has more or less produced, wherever it has acquired the ascendancy; if its connexion with vice be such as that you must always expect the one where you find the other,—then in proportion to the sincerity with which you are attached to moral purity and moral rectitude, will be the aversion that you feel and exhibit to every system of infidelity. Every degree of importance that you attach to the prevalence of good morals—every argument which helps to convince you that these are endangered by the rejection of Christianity—and every instance of their actual deterioration under the operation of such a cause, must determine and increase your opposition to those maxims which go to represent the gospel as a fa-

ble, and to overturn the dominion of religious belief. And, convinced that the greatest enemies of human virtue are to be found in those who, whether from wantonness or from design, would persuade men that revelation is false, you will eye all their attempts with the utmost jealousy and alarm, you will resist these with unbending firmness, and you will regard them as so many motives for more strenuous efforts to "build yourselves up in your most holy faith," and to contend earnestly for its stability and its influence in the world.

SERMON IV.

SAME TEXT.

IN our last discourse we endeavored to show that infidelity is in every respect hostile to the interests of morality. We are now to illustrate the proposition that *Infidelity is destructive of the comfort and the happiness of those who embrace it.*

Whatever may be alleged to the contrary, it is quite true in point of fact, that virtue and vice severally lead to happiness and misery. Particular circumstances may occur to counteract or to modify this tendency; and sometimes the real condition and experience of those whom it affects may be so carefully concealed, that its workings are not visible to the most careful observer. But still it gives so many and such striking demonstrations of itself, as to leave us no room for doubting that it is a general law to which human nature is subject amidst all the diversified circumstances in which it is placed. And it is a law which op-

erates equally on individuals, and on families, and on nations ; so that wherever we find the greatest freedom from unhallowed indulgence and the strictest observance of the moral law, there do we find the highest degree of private enjoyment, of domestic peace, and of public prosperity. And on the other hand, we never fail almost to see the commission of sin accompanied by pain and wretchedness, in a measure proportioned to its heinousness and extent, and inflicting injury, more or less, on the health, the fortune, the reputation, the thousand different sources from which men are accustomed to derive the gratifications and delights of the present life.

Now, if the reasoning was sound and conclusive by which we attempted to establish the immoral effects of infidelity, this odious system must of course be chargeable with no inconsiderable proportion of that misery which unholy conduct so largely and so certainly produces. And, indeed, my friends, if you consider the subject closely, and take an accurate survey of what passes in the world beside you and around you, it must be obvious to you, in the *first* place, that the most painful and most inveterate of those evils which break in upon the harmony and satisfaction of human life, proceed more immediately or more remotely, in one shape or another, from the prevalence of sin in its manifold varieties : And it must be obvious to you, in the *second* place, that every act of iniquity, whether committed by the systematic infidel or by the nominal Christian, may be traced ultimately to the “evil heart of unbelief” in the person committing it, who, having never possessed at

all or having lost for the time, the fear of Almighty God, is thereby prepared for every criminal act, to which interest may allure, or to which passion may impel. Hence a vast multitude of those inquietudes and distresses which you every day behold, and which you either never think of accounting for, or which you so readily ascribe to mere accident, may be ascertained, by a very simple process of induction, to be the legitimate offspring of scepticism and infidelity. This is best perceived, indeed, in cases of extreme profligacy, which are by no means uncommon: but a minute inquiry will also make it manifest to you, in ten thousand instances which would otherwise have escaped your notice, although they afford just as real proofs as the other, of the mischievous effect of infidelity upon human happiness, and may be considered, indeed, as even more convincing, because they are continually occurring, and may be every where discovered.

But infidelity operates still more directly in impairing or destroying our comfort. It implies the negation of all those truths which tend most effectually to support and to cheer us under the calamities of our lot. Even in the midst of prosperity, the doctrines which it teaches us to reject are calculated to elevate our minds and to increase our joy. We partake of the blessings of life with a far purer and a far higher relish, when we regard them as bestowed by the hand of an all-perfect God, and when we receive them through the channel of a mercy secured to us by the mediation of his own Son, and when we contemplate them as pledges and foretastes of that "fulness

of joy" which remains for us "at his right hand" in heaven. And that which deprives us of this divine relish, must so far be deemed inimical to us, as abridging our happiness, which at the best is but mixed and circumscribed. But such is the effect of infidelity, whose baneful touch withers the charm of every earthly blessing, reduces it to the degraded level of a mere animal gratification, and leaves us to feed upon it like the beasts that perish, without a thought that rises above the dust, and without a hope that points beyond the grave.

It is, however, amidst trials and sorrows, that infidelity appears in its justest and most frightful aspect. When subjected to the multifarious ills which flesh is heir to, what is there to uphold our spirit, but the discoveries and the prospects that are unfolded to us by revelation? What, for this purpose, can be compared with the belief that every thing here below is under the management of infinite wisdom and goodness, and that there is an immortality of bliss awaiting us in another world? If this conviction be taken away, what is it that we can have recourse to, on which the mind may patiently and safely repose in the season of adversity? Where is the balm which I may apply with effect to my wounded heart, after I have rejected the aid of the Almighty physician? Impose upon me whatever hardships you please; give me nothing but the bread of sorrow to eat; take from me the friends in whom I had placed my confidence; lay me in the cold hut of poverty, and on the thorny bed of disease; set death before me in all its terrors; do all this,—only let me trust in my Saviour, and "pillow my head on the bosom of omnipotence;" and I will "fear no evil,"—I will

rise superior to affliction,—I will “rejoice in my tribulation.” But let infidelity interpose between God and my soul, and draw its impenetrable veil over a future state of existence, and limit all my trust to the creatures of a day, and all my expectations to a few years as uncertain as they are short; and how shall I bear up, with fortitude or with cheerfulness, under the burden of distress? Or, where shall I find one drop of consolation, to put into the bitter draught which has been given me to drink? I look over the whole range of this wilderness in which I dwell, but I see not one covert from the storm, nor one leaf for the healing of my soul, nor one cup of cold water to refresh me in the weariness and the faintings of my pilgrimage. O! what can I be but comfortless and wretched, when I am without Christ, without God, and without hope?

My friends, you cannot be in affliction,—you cannot suppose yourselves to be in affliction, without feeling that infidelity is destructive of your only solid comfort. It may be true, that as infidels have their pleasures while life is prosperous with them, so there may be many circumstances which tend to mitigate their sorrows under the pressure of adversity. But their principles shut them out from the best and highest consolations which the human mind can have recourse to amidst its multiplied distresses, and are peculiarly calculated indeed to aggravate the most painful and most inevitable of those evils to which humanity is liable.

I might say to one of you, You see death approaching; but you are prepared for the event,

from which nature so instinctively recoils, by living like a Christian, in the faith and the hope of the Gospel,—in the faith which reposes on a mighty Saviour, and in the hope which “enters into that within the veil;” and under the powerful influence of these principles you are not only tranquil, but triumphant. But the infidel would rob you at once of your tranquillity and your triumph, and cast a shade of annihilation over the glory that is now before you, and plunge you into the gulf of darkness and despair.

I might say to another, You have an only child, endeared to you by every Christian virtue and by every filial affection. A hopeless disease has begun its ravages on his frame. The tie which has hitherto united your heart to his, and from which your sweetest earthly comforts have flowed, is about to be dissolved. You feel as if your own existence were drawing to its close. And yet your spirit does not sink under the sore calamity. It is “cast down, but not destroyed.” You see the child of your bosom ripe for the immortality on which his own hopes had been early placed, and you anticipate, through the mercy of your God, and the merits of your Saviour, a blessed and indissoluble reunion with him in the regions of everlasting light, and life, and glory. But the infidel would tear up all your anticipations by the root; he would persuade you that the virtues and the hopes of your child are equally vain; he would make you bury every consolatory expectation in the grave where you are to lay him, and either cause a parent’s tears to flow for ever, or

steel a parent's heart against all the best and tenderest sympathies of nature.

I might say to a third, You are about to die, and to leave your wife and your family amidst the difficulties, the snares, and the sorrows of that world, from which you are ready to depart for ever. Bitter is the pang of separation. But you are comforted when you think of Him who rules over the affairs of men; who takes care of all who are committed to him in the confidence of faith; who spreads his protecting wings over the faithful that are cast, destitute and forlorn, upon his bounty; and who says to the dying saint, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widow trust in me." But the infidel would embitter your last hour; he would wring your bosom with the most poignant distress, at the very moment that you stand most in need of consolation; and he would do this by telling you, that when you trust your nearest and dearest friends to Providence, you indulge in a foolish delusion,—that they must lie at the mercy of a fatherless, forsaken, and ungoverned world,—that vain is every prayer that you put up for them, and vain every hope that you cherish for them, in your departing moments.

I might say to all of you, As you pass through the vale of tears, you meet with much to pain and distress you. Disappointments, losses, sickness, calumny, persecution, ingratitude, treachery, a thousand ills beset your path, giving you wearisome days and sleepless nights, and sometimes filling your souls with indescribable anguish. Amidst them all, though you may not be so presumptuous

as to say that "patience has had its perfect work," yet you have been comforted and upheld by what Christianity tells you of the origin, the design, and the end of your afflictions. It tells you that they originate in the appointment of a Being infinitely wise, holy, powerful, and good ; that their design is to promote your best interests, and that their end is an "exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But the infidel would have you to ascribe them to unmeaning chance or to relentless fate ; he would take away from them the character of a wise and salutary discipline ; he would teach you to regard them as proofs that we live in a chaos of good and evil, over which no benignant intelligence presides ; and when you look forward to another state, where all that is now mysterious in your afflictions shall be satisfactorily explained, and all that is now sad in your condition shall be exchanged for endless bliss, he would convince you that such a consummation is but the vision of poetry or of superstition, and that if death must be represented under the pleasing image of a sleep, it is a sleep from which you are never, never to awake.

Now, in circumstances such as I have supposed, what is the aspect which infidelity wears ? Is it that of a friend, or of a foe ? Is there one pang which it alleviates, or one comfort which it brings ? Or rather, does it not aggravate every affliction a thousand fold, and render it insupportable and overwhelming ? Is not this its obvious tendency ? Is not this its common effect ?

It is easy, indeed, to deride or disregard all this, when no calamity is felt or seen. In health and prosperity the consoling power of religion is not

so much needed ; its value is not so readily prized ; its necessity is not so fully acknowledged. And those who are free from bodily distress and untouched by outward misfortune—who are wallowing in wealth and pleasure, and never allow their eyes to settle on a scene of misery, or their ears to listen to a tale of woe from which they can turn away, may flatter themselves that there is not much occasion for comfort, and that, therefore, infidelity, in this respect, cannot do much harm. But take a more extended view of human life ; think of the frailty of man, the dangers to which he is exposed, the misfortunes to which he is liable ; remember the days of his darkness, which experience testifies to be many and evil ; leave the house of feasting, and visit the house of mourning ; enter the dwellings of the poor, who are struggling with the united hardships of indigence and sickness ; go to the chamber of disease, and see its victim, after having suffered for years, still looking forward to years of suffering more ; behold the dying parent surrounded with his destitute weeping family, and regarding them with looks that would melt a heart of stone ; and say, without affectation or reserve, whether would you send to them the Christian or the infidel ; whether would you address to them the language of faith or of unbelief ; whether would you tell them that they are under the administration of a wise and gracious God, and that their distresses shall be made to “work together for their good,” and that there is a land of rest, an unsuffering kingdom, an everlasting habitation, into which the

faithful shall be ere long introduced,—or, that there is no God who concerns himself about their fate ; no benevolent intention in the afflictions to which they are subjected ; no joy in which their sorrows are to terminate ; no immortality to enlighten the dark “ valley of the shadow of death ? ” There is but one answer that the heart of the most careless and the most hardened of you will allow you to give. And having given it, and borne your testimony to the truth, go back again, if you will, to the gaieties and the pleasures of the world, but never repeat the assertion—never harbour the thought, that infidelity is any thing else than a stern, relentless enemy to the comfort of man, who is “ born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.”

And are we to forget, amidst our contemplations, the horrors and the distresses of a guilty conscience ? No, my friends, in spite of all the attempts that are made, and all the ingenuity that is exercised, to efface the impressions of a God, who has given a law for the regulation of our conduct, and who will “ judge the world in righteousness,” moments will occur when the sinner shall be filled with “ the terrors of the Lord,” and unable to shake off the consciousness of transgression, and the fear of punishment. In these awful moments, religion has the power of speaking peace to him,—“ a peace, too, which passeth understanding.” It tells him that the God whom he has offended is a merciful God. It tells him of one who is “ mighty and able to save him to the very uttermost.” It discloses to him a re-

demption suited to all his need. It invites him to partake of it "without money and without price." And it inspires him with the hope that is "full of immortality." But mark the cruelty and the baseness of infidelity to an awakened sinner. After it has encouraged him in his crimes,—after it has prompted and seduced him to those indulgences which now fill him with compunction and sorrow, it would abandon him to the misery in which it has involved him. It has not succeeded in effectually convincing him that there is no God, and no retribution, and in preventing him from feeling the the agonies of remorse, and the apprehensions of divine wrath; but it has banished from his creed all that could have soothed those agonies, and removed these apprehensions; it has blotted out the very name of a Saviour from the tablet of his heart; it has formed a great gulf between him and the throne of mercy, over which his prayers and his hopes can never pass; it makes a mock of his wretchedness, and leaves him to perish in despair.

The very conduct of infidels in spreading their system with so much eagerness and industry, affords a striking proof that its influence is essentially hostile to human happiness. For what is their conduct? Why, they allow that religion contributes largely to the comfort of man,—that, in this respect, as well as with respect to morality, it would be a great evil were it to lose its hold over their affections,—and that those are no friends to the world who would shake or destroy their belief in it. And yet, in the very face of this acknowledgement, they scruple not to publish

their doubts and their unbelief concerning it among their fellow men, and with all the cool deliberation of philosophy, and sometimes with all the keenness and ardor of a zealot, to do the very thing which they profess to deprecate as pernicious to the well-being and comfort of the species. Whether they are sincere in this profession, or whether they are only trifling with the sense and feeling of mankind, still it demonstrates the hardening influence of their principles; and from principles, which make those who hold them so reckless of the peace, and order, and happiness of their brethren, what can be reasonably expected, but every thing which is most destructive of human comfort?

It is true the infidel may be very humane in the intercourse of life; but, after all, what dependence can be placed upon that humanity of his, which deals out bread to the hungry, and clothing to the naked, and yet would sacrifice to literary vanity, or to something worse, whatever can give support in trial, and consolation at death? He may sympathize with me in my distress, and speak to me of immortality, and at the very moment, his constitutional kindness may be triumphing over his cold-blooded and gloomy speculations. But his speculations have shed a misery over my heart, which no language of his can dissipate, and which makes his most affectionate words sound in my ear like the words of mockery and scorn. He has destroyed me, and he cannot save me, and he cannot comfort me. At his bidding, I have renounced that Saviour in whom I once trusted, and was happy, and have banish-

ed that Comforter, who once dwelt with me, and would have dwelt with me as a comforter forever. And he now pities me, as if his most pitying tones could charm away the anguish of my bosom, and make me forget that it was he himself who planted it there, and planted it so deep, and nourished it so well, that nothing but the power of that heaven, whose power I have denied, is able to pluck it out. Yes, after he has destroyed my belief in the superintending providence of God,—after he has taught me that the prospect of a hereafter is but the baseless fabric of a vision,—after he has bred and nourished in me a contempt for that sacred volume which alone throws light over this benighted world,—after having cheated me out of my faith by his sophistries, or laughed me out of it by his ridicule,—after having thus wrung from my soul every drop of consolation, and dried up my very spirit within me,—yes, after having accomplished this in the season of my health and my prosperity, he would come to me while I mourn, and treat me like a drivelling idiot, whom he may sport with, because he has ruined me, and to whom, in the plenitude of his compassion,—too late, and too unavailing,—he may talk of truths in which he himself does not believe, and which he has long exhorted me, and has at last persuaded me, to cast away as the dreams and the delusions of human folly!—From such comforters may heaven preserve me! “My soul, come not thou into *their* secret. Unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united!”

Thus have we considered the evil effects of infidelity on the morals and comfort of those who

embrace it, or submit to its influence. We do not mean to affirm, indeed, that this of itself is a valid argument against infidelity, or that religion is to be admitted as true, merely because it is more beneficial. We have better reasons than this for abiding by Christianity; and, of course, more conclusive objections against the system of unbelief. But as we have so much to urge in favour of our faith,—as we have so many and such powerful evidences to support it,—then, whenever the question comes to be, whether we shall hold it fast or throw it away, I see nothing either irrational or unphilosophical in allowing that view of the subject which we have been taking to determine us against infidelity. Granting that the two sides of the controversy were in other respects equally balanced, that which is most to our real advantage should have the preference. An infidel writer has said, that “undoubtedly in our travels to the other world, the common road is the safest.” And his remark is abundantly sound. We should rather be wrong with the Christian, than right with the infidel. Much better surely to take our chance of finding the Gospel false, than run the risk of finding it true. Our system has this at least to recommend it, that it contributes essentially, and contributes largely, to the virtue and happiness of the world. And when death comes, as come to all of us it will, if there be nothing after it, the ashes of the infidel will not repose more quietly than ours. And if there be a righteous and eternal retribution, O how unwise his calculation, how severe his disappointment, how awful and irremediable his fate!

But we rest not our cause upon such dubious ground as this. We believe in the truth of our holy religion, because it has been proved by evidence the most ample and satisfactory. And we adduce the immoral and comfortless tendency of infidelity, to show that we have something valuable to contend for, when we set ourselves against its encroachments, and good reason to call upon you to listen with caution and with jealousy to the objections which its advocates state so dogmatically, and urge so strenuously, against the religion of Christ.

In fact, too little attention is paid to its consequences. We read the books which contain it, and regard them as curious abstract speculations, which display acute and subtle talents, and provoke us to give some ingenious reasoning in return. We meet with those by whom it is maintained, and in the brilliancy of their wit, or the agreeableness of their manners, or the extent of their information, we forget that they are unbelievers, or that their unbelief has any malignant influence. We see, and we admire, and we applaud the services which they render to the cause of science, or to the cause of humanity, and dream not, that from the same fountain which has enlarged the boundaries of learning and of knowledge, there can flow a stream so foul and so devouring as that of infidelity.

Now, to break this delusion, natural enough, but incalculably pernicious, I say, look to the consequences of infidelity. See how it covers the scene of human life with all the abominations of licentiousness and crime: and how, while it de-

stroys the present comforts, it darkens and desolates all the future prospects of our species. Witness its frightful doings, not merely in the higher classes of society, where its hideousness and its mischief are moderated by the influence of superior education, or glossed over by the elegances of polished life; but in every inferior condition, down to the lowest and the neediest of the people, among whom it assumes its most forbidding aspect, and produces its most cruel and most ruinous effects. If you go into a poor man's cottage, for instance, you may perhaps see vice and misery reigning in it, and it may not occur to you that his evils are the direct and legitimate offspring of infidelity. He may not know very distinctly what infidelity is, or be able to speak about it with understanding. But after all, you may find that he is its victim; that he has been brought into his wicked course by the influence of example; and that the criminal example, to which he owes his guilt and his ruin, has resulted solely from a rejection of the Christian faith. Nay, you may be able to trace it to the interference of another, as poor as himself, who had discovered by the help of his superiors, that the Gospel is a fable, and who, unwilling to limit the knowledge or the benefit of such a discovery, had plied him, among others, with the consideration of its importance, and its happy bearings on his conduct and condition, till he had prevailed upon him to become as unbelieving as himself; and for a doctrine that gives full play to his strongest passions, and unbounded latitude to his political dissatisfactions, to renounce that which had hitherto guided him

in the path of righteousness, and comforted him in the midst of his adversities, and brought contentment, and peace, and joy, to dwell under his humble roof.

Infidelity is not confined to books of philosophy or to men of learning. It does not slumber on the shelves of an inaccessible library, or lie concealed in disquisitions which are intelligible to none but scientific adepts. It once bore this stately and secluded character ; but it bears it no longer. It has become more condescending, more open, and more active. There is a kind of it which itinerates through our cities, and our villages, our market-places, and our workshops. It is not accompanied by the subtleties of metaphysical language, and does not carry along with it the reasons or arguments that you find in the works of Bolingbroke and Hume : But it moves in all the various forms of artful objections, and profane maxims, and significant sneers, and vulgar wit. It is divested of those refinements with which taste, and ingenuity, and eloquence, had clothed it in the pages of the man of literature or science : But it is not less substantial, it is not less malignant, it is not less destructive of all that is fair, and good, and happy, in the world. And wherever it finds its way, and holds its dominion, there does it invariably degrade the character, and wanton with the miseries of those whom it has seduced and enslaved.

As, then, you tender your own welfare, and would promote the welfare of your fellow-men, “take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief.” Let infidelity be the object

of your decided and interminable abhorrence, and let Christianity, to which it stands in frowning and everlasting opposition, be the object of your highest reverence and your most cordial attachment. Be jealous, and guarded and resolute, when the unbeliever is throwing out his jests at its doctrines, or wielding his objections against its credibilty. Surely it becomes you to pause long, and to ponder well, before you consent to abjure or to think lightly of a system which has been of such unspeakable benefit to multitudes of human beings, and the renunciation of which would bring along with it evils, the most disastrous and irremediable that ever befel the children of men. Surely you will not rashly abandon those prospects which it has set before you, and by which it has cheered you in adversity, and makes you anticipate eternity with triumph; nor will you listen with a willing ear to the ridicule with which its enemies have assailed it, or to the ingenious sophistry with which they try to perplex its evidences, or even to the grave arguments by which they endeavor to overthrow its credit, and to bring all the mischiefs of irreligion on this already too dark, and too thoughtless, and too miserable world. Surely you will be more true to yourselves, and more faithful and more merciful to your brethren, than to exchange, without the maturest deliberation, the source of so much purity, and so much comfort, for that which would first abandon you to a life without God, and then to a death without hope.

And if you are enlightened to see the infinite evil of infidelity, I trust that you will set your-

selves to discourage it, and bear it down by all the influence which God has given you. If you are men of intellectual power; if you are invested with official authority; if you are placed in elevated stations; if you are teachers, or masters, or parents, to whom the youth of our country are looking up for instruction and guidance; then you are under peculiar obligations to resist it with united energy; and these obligations I call upon you, by all that is sacred, to fulfil. Nor let any man imagine, however humble his condition, however mean his talents, however limited his sphere of activity, that he is incapable of being useful, and that he is consequently exempted from the warfare which must be waged against this enemy of the peace and righteousness of the world. No, my friends, you have your wholesome counsels, and your good conversation, and your holy conduct, and your fervent prayers, and your spiritual charities; and these are instruments, "mighty through God, to the pulling down of its strongest holds," and to the frustrating of its most artful machinations; and it is incumbent on you to employ them with vigor and perseverance, that you may do your part in saving our race from an evil, infinitely worse than the "pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noon-day."

SERMON V.

SAME TEXT.

THE term "unbelief" is of general import. And our opinion of the person of whom it is predicated, usually depends upon the object to which his unbelief attaches. We can suppose him rejecting only some particular doctrine of revelation: Or we can suppose him rejecting the Christian revelation itself: Or we can suppose him rejecting every thing that goes under the comprehensive name of religion. We can suppose all this; and the common notion is, that it is frequently realized. Nay, this scale of unbelief is still more minutely graduated. There are, between the two extremes, points of greater and points of less importance, in almost infinite variety; and whoever rejects any one of them, with which the idea of sacredness has been associated, is so far an unbeliever, and so far departs from the living God. But we are accustomed to estimate the demerit of

his unbelief by the precise article upon which it is fixed. Our aversion to him on account of that quality may in one case be slight, and in another strong, and in another total and unqualified. And where we know merely that there is something which he will not receive, without knowing what it is, and without being aware of its degree of relative importance, we commonly rest satisfied that there is nothing about which we need to be much concerned.

Now, we apprehend, that for these distinctions in unbelief, there is not the foundation in truth which is usually imagined. They exist rather in profession and in appearance than in reality. They are all modifications of the same great evil, and expressions of the same radical principle. And although, on a superficial and inexperienced view, there may seem to be a wide difference subsisting among them, they are cherished by one common spirit, as they are distinguished by one common character; the transition from the least considerable to the most offensive of them, is neither rare nor difficult; and when this transition does not actually take place, it may always be traced to adventitious causes, and may be considered as nothing more than a mere accidental exception to the natural operation and progress of unbelief.

By following out this idea, and by judging of men, not according to what they seem, or profess, or think themselves to be, but according to the more correct and searching tests with which their conduct furnishes us for ascertaining their real state and character, we shall find that there are

many to whom the charge of an evil heart of unbelief most justly applies, although they would indignantly spurn from them the reproach of infidelity, and would be considered by others as calumniated if such a thing were imputed to them. We shall adduce a few examples.

1. And, *first*, we mention those who reject one part of revelation, while they admit the rest,—as affording an appropriate illustration of our statement.

With regard to such persons, it may be observed, that the very same reason which alone entitles, and which alone determines them to believe it in general, should operate in making them believe every particular article that it contains. And if they can bring themselves to set aside a single iota of that which is accredited by the direct testimony of God himself, we see nothing in the way of evidence which should hinder them from discarding the whole of it, without ceremony and without reserve. By that solitary exception in making up their creed, however trifling it may be in relative importance, and however insignificant in its practical effects, they have violated the principle of submission to the divine will, or they have denied the veracity of the divine character; and thus they have broken down the only substantial, permanent and impassable barrier which opposed itself to their utter and undisguised rejection of God's message. They may still hold by those doctrines on which we are accustomed to set the greatest value; but the tenure which binds them to these is no longer of that sacred and commanding kind which secures unlimited acquiescence; it no lon-

ger resolves itself into the lofty and unbending maxim upon which, as creatures, they are ever bound to act, "that the Lord hath spoken it;" it is now converted into the brittle tie of human reason, and of human feeling, and lies at the mercy of the ten thousand influences which are constantly operating to pervert the one, or to corrupt the other. There is an inconsistency in their mode of proceeding of which they can scarcely fail to be conscious, which cannot be without its effect, whether they be conscious of it or not. It will either, on the one hand, be removed by their returning to the faith of that which they had set aside in the face of a divine testimony; or, on the other hand, if it be not altogether done away with, it will certainly be rendered more obvious and decisive, by the renunciation of such other truths as may be at war with their prejudices, their passions, and their interests. And, as the evil heart of unbelief has been deliberately taken from under the control of that divine authority which was formerly acknowledged, and which has put its seal upon every page and every sentence of revelation, we can be at no great loss to ascertain which of these processes is most likely to be realized in their experience. Having once permitted a disregard or a defiance of any thing whatever which God has been pleased to communicate to them for their instruction or their guidance, to settle in their minds, they have entered on the path of infidelity, and all before them is a downward career, in which every successive step strengthens the inclination, and increases the facility of proceeding farther, till they arrive at that stage of degen-

eracy at which Christianity is proclaimed to be a cunning fable, and its law is denounced as an intolerable bondage.

It will not do, as we have already hinted, to say that the particular point which they have dispensed with is of little moment, and that salvation may be attained without it. It may be of little moment, compared with other points that are to be found in Christianity; but it is not of little moment as a part of God's communication, and as an intimation of his will, intended, as it must be, for our benefit, in some way or another. The single consideration of its coming from Him, is enough to constitute our obligation to receive it with humility, and to treat it with respect; and though other considerations may add to its importance, that is the circumstance which gives it its great and primary importance as an object of faith. And as to its use in the matter of our salvation, it may not be absolutely indispensable for the accomplishment of that end, and many may be saved who have never known any thing about it; and yet that is no good reason for our suffering ourselves to cast it out of our creed, and for maintaining that, in spite of our deliberate refusal of this part of the divine record, we are not to be accused of having the "evil heart of unbelief." The principle of unbelief may be at work in small things as well as in great things. And this I will be bold to say, that salvation is not likely to accompany that faith, since faith it must be called, which takes exceptions against the wisdom of God, and uses its own freedom with his dispensations, both because such treatment of him is itself

a great sin, and because the spirit which it indicates must more or less affect the whole of the regards which are paid to the gospel scheme.

But, besides this, the word *importance*, as used in this case, is a very ambiguous word, and the application actually made of it is such as would lead one to conclude that there is no great importance in any one part of the Bible. One man says that the doctrine of our Saviour's divinity is of no great importance; and another says the same thing of the doctrine respecting the agency of the Holy Spirit; a third reiterates the assertion as to the atonement itself; and a fourth will even attach the stigma to good works. So that in this way, we see all that is essential to the gospel, whether it be considered as a plan of mercy or as a rule of duty, discarded on the principle we are speaking of; and this view of its application leads us to see the folly and the danger of acting upon it in any one particular whatever. The plain and obvious answer to such assumptions, independently of what might be said on the various truths alluded to as being of infinite moment, is this; that these, and all the other positions with which they stand connected, *are* of importance as forming constituent parts of that revelation which the Almighty has vouchsafed to us, and that, though they could be demonstrated, as they never can, to possess far less importance than what we usually attach to them, or even though, in their own intrinsic nature, they were altogether destitute of it, it is of high and incalculable importance that we give credit to what the Lord has told us concerning them; and if we withhold that credit, if we refuse to give

it in its fullest extent, then, by rejecting what the God of supreme authority, and of unerring truth, has declared, we afford the most unequivocal and undeniable proofs of our having the "evil heart of unbelief."

These remarks are by no means intended to implicate those who merely do not embrace every thing that is propounded to them as the dictate of inspiration. They must be allowed to judge for themselves; and if there be any tenet which they do not find in the word of God, though it has been discovered there by other men, they are not only entitled, but they are bound in conscience, to exclude it from their creed; and to them, therefore, nothing that we have said has any legitimate application.

We allude to those who withhold their assent from any portion of that which they yet receive as a divine revelation, or who, in making up a canon of scripture, or in forming a system of revealed truth for themselves, put away from them the least statement which does not agree with their own reasonings, or suit their own taste, without inquiring, and without minding, whether it has not, after all, the high and holy sanction of heaven. We affirm of such, that in spite of all the doctrines which they profess to hold, they have given a decisive exhibition of the evil heart of unbelief; that having departed in one case from what the living God has told them, as if it were not true, they are prepared for departing from his testimony as far as temptation may happen to carry them; that the principle of faith in his declarations being

thus set at nought, there is not a truth in the bible which they can maintain upon the ground that it has him for its author; that, if they deny the depravity of human nature, for instance, while yet they must admit that it is taught in Scripture, they may just as well deny the mediation of Christ, and the influences of the Spirit, and the resurrection of the dead, and every other statement in that volume of which the Almighty has said, "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." And we would hold out this as a warning to all those who are in danger, or who are in the habit, of making free with any part of the word of God which does not happen to correspond with their conceptions of divine things, or which it is not very agreeable to their worldly feelings to make a part of their religious creed. They thus show that the evil heart of unbelief is still working in them; and if they thus yield, for any reason whatever, to its suggestion and guidance, it is impossible to say how far they may go in "departing from the living God."

2. Another illustration of our statement is to be found in the case of those whose lives are characterized by impiety and immorality.

It sometimes happens, that those who hold and profess the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, indulge in practices that are very different from what is required of them by the moral precepts of Christianity. And it as often happens that there are men who take advantage of this unworthy con-

duct, to depreciate the doctrinal views with which it is associated, and to deny the sincerity of the persons who maintain it. We do not stand up for any thing so contradictory. We would condemn, and we would lament, and we would remonstrate against it. But it is curious enough to observe, that the very men who are so eagle-eyed in detecting, and so merciless in exposing, the unworthiness referred to, are often worse beyond comparison in their deportment, and yet pretend to believe in the Gospel. They live at large; and yet they must not be accused or suspected of having that evil heart of unbelief. They bewail the prevalence of infidelity in the world around them; they lift up an open testimony against it; and they bless themselves, that, in this respect, they are "not partakers of other men's sins."

This is a fact of much more frequent occurrence than is commonly imagined. It is a melancholy one. It is fraught with much mischief; and, therefore, it deserves to be exposed, both for the sake of those to whom it attaches, and for the general interests of Christianity.

We allow that a man may have a Christian faith, and yet may act *occasionally* an unworthy part. Through the infirmity of his nature, he may yield to a sudden or powerful temptation; and thus be "overtaken in a fault." But even then, he goes astray just because he ceases to have faith for the time; or which is much the same thing, because the objects on which his faith is accustomed to operate, are, in consequence of the intervention of sensible objects, and of the tumult of lawless passions, so indistinctly seen, or so completely ob-

scured, as to be incapable of producing their native and ordinary effects. And the moment that he comes to himself,—the moment that the paroxysm of desire is over, or that the external allure-ment is withdrawn, and that his faith is permitted to see with its wonted clearness, he feels remorse and sorrow for having departed from the living God, and sets himself to be more vigilant, more self-denied, and more obedient in future,—thus showing, in the most decisive manner, that he is in truth a believer, and that his faith had only suffered a temporary interruption in its exercise, from the prevalence of a temporary cause. He knows from experience, as well as from the word of God, that he has naturally such a decided propensity to sin, and that this propensity meets with so much encouragement from outward circumstances, as to stand in need of some powerful principle to resist and counteract it, and to secure that personal holiness which it tends to impair or to destroy. He knows, from the same sources of information, that this principle is faith; that, so long as he was destitute of it, sin had dominion over him, and he was its willing, polluted, and degraded slave; that this it is which has “purified his heart,” which has given him the victory over the world, which has disposed and animated him to those deeds of moral virtue with which his character is now adorned; and that, in proportion to its energy and its liveliness, are the attainments which he makes in piety, and purity, and every good work. And hence it is a matter of primary moment with him, to cultivate it by every suitable means, to keep it in constant exercise, to look often to its

foundations and its encouragements, and to pray fervently that it may not be permitted to fail in the hour of trial, but may daily become more and more efficient, not only as a source of peace and joy, but also as an instrument for his sanctification in soul, and body, and spirit.

Now, my friends, if this account of the Christian be correct, it cannot be that you should *habitually* sin against God, and yet have faith established in your minds. If you are wicked, in the ordinary tenor of your conduct, it must proceed from an "evil heart of unbelief." Infidelity is unquestionably the cause of it. And all the professions you can make, and all the sophistry you can employ, are utterly insufficient to draw us away from this conclusion. Whatever theory you may get up about the connection between a man's principles and his practice, and about the possibility of retaining good principles after the practice has become bad, to this truth we can never be insensible, that the Gospel is the only instrument by which "the disobedient are converted to the wisdom of the just;" and that the Gospel does, in fact, produce this moral change, wherever it is really and cordially believed.

Your belief in the Gospel, indeed, does not afford a perfect security against your breaking the divine law. But such is the nature of that belief, and such is the character of its objects, that it must, upon the whole, be preventive of ungodliness and vice. All the doctrines to which it points, are calculated to operate with a controlling and purifying influence on those in whom it dwells; and all the precepts with which these doctrines are ac-

accompanied, are wholly without meaning, except in so far as they direct and govern you; and it is one of the very things in which you are understood to believe, that your faith is a practical principle, and that every truth to which it is directed, must be so embraced, as to become a guide or a motive to holiness. If, therefore, you surrender yourselves to the sway of unhallowed passions, and walk after the imaginations of your own hearts, and if your past transgressions, instead of filling you with compunction, and being succeeded by a more watchful and circumspect behaviour, are recollected with indifference or with pleasure, and only pave the way for a more open and reckless violation of every moral restraint, it must necessarily be inferred, that infidelity is working and reigning in your breast.

You may not profess infidelity. You may not be distinctly conscious of acting upon its principles. You may not have formally, even in your own mind, renounced your adherence to Christianity. You may perhaps *imagine* that it still holds its place in your regard as a divine system. But to say that you really believe it, though you contradict its whole spirit and letter, and design and tendency, in your habitual deportment, is to make an assertion which we feel it impossible to credit. Where, in this case, is the proof of your faith? Where is there a single symptom of its existence in your mind? Where shall we look for one evidence, on which we can rely, that you truly possess it? What credit can we give to your verbal declarations, when they are not only not supported, but absolutely belied by the uniform

tenor of your conduct? All that you present to our view, and from which we are best able to judge of your sincerity, indicates a total want of that to which you nevertheless pretend. You affect to be believers, and yet you act in every respect as if you were unbelievers; for if you *were* unbelievers, we should expect your deportment to be exactly what it is with your present profession. Surely, then, we are warranted to infer, that you are only deceiving yourselves, or attempting to deceive us, when you take your station among those who believe.

You would not decide in this way, when judging of other men in other cases. An individual who has an enlightened and established confidence in the government of his country, may, in an unguarded moment, be seduced into a disloyal or rebellious action. And if he returns to his allegiance without delay, and expresses contrition for having broken it, and acts in future, as he had done before, the part of a good and faithful subject, you would not hesitate to admit that his better principles had only been subdued for a season by some peculiar temptation, or that he had merely forgotten what he knew that he owed, and had determined to pay, to legal and acknowledged authority. But supposing that he was continually uttering the language of sedition, and encouraging by every means a spirit of disaffection among his countrymen, and carrying, without disguise, the standard of revolt and insurrection throughout the land, would you confide in the most solemn assurances he could give you, that he believed the government to be constitutionally most excellent,

and most wisely administered—that he believed submission to it to be not only the dictate of duty, but necessary for his own safety and welfare—and that he believed opposition to it to be as ruinous to his worldly interests as it was inconsistent with his most matured convictions? Certainly not. And yet you would have us to confide in the asseverations that you make of your believing in the authority, and wisdom, and righteousness, and mercy, and necessity, of the government of Almighty God as unfolded in the Gospel, though your life is one continued series of trespasses against his law, and the only language of your conduct is, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways: What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit shall we have if we pray unto him!”

Take religion as a whole, or consider it in all its various parts, and you must be sensible that no absurdity can be greater than the allegation that you are firm believers in it, while, at the same time, you do nothing which it requires, and every thing which it forbids. What! Can you be said to believe in God, as he has been pleased to reveal himself, though you be every day and every hour insulting him by profane oaths, and setting all his attributes at defiance by deliberate and multiplied transgression? Can you be said to believe in his providence, though you murmur at its dispensations, and speak as if it were unjust, or act as if it were but an idle fiction? Can you be said to believe in the character and work of Jesus as the Saviour, though you persevere wilfully in that, from which he bore the agony of the

cross to redeem you? Can you be said to believe in heaven, though you are going on to disqualify yourselves more and more for being finally admitted into it? Can you be said to believe in hell, though you are unceasingly, and with your eyes open, practising that which must at length plunge you into its condemnation and its terrors? Can you be said to believe in the moral system of the Gospel, as enacted by divine authority, and enforced by divine sanctions, though you are perpetually trampling its precepts under foot, and treating it with less respect than you would show to the commandments of an earthly superior? Surely it is not possible, that a faith and a practice, between which there is such a wide and manifest and perpetual contrariety, should subsist together. Surely there can be no communion of this kind between such light and such darkness.

Examine yourselfs closely, and you will find that the frame of your mind corresponds exactly with your outward demeanour; that the evil heart of unbelief is lodging within you; that this alone accounts for that ungodliness and immorality with which you are chargeable; and that it is in vain for you to flatter yourselves with the idea, that while you are indulging in this immorality and ungodliness, you are entitled to be regarded in any other light, either by yourselves or by your fellow men, than that of the disciples and abettors of infidelity.

But if you still can allow yourselves, while you are pursuing a course of profligacy and profaneness, to speak of retaining firmly your conviction

of the truth, and your attachment to the doctrines of religion—if you still suppose yourselves capable of realizing such an inconsistency, and are inclined to derive any confidence or comfort from one part of it, while you continue to indulge in the other, I would remind you, that when your conviction of the truth, and your attachment to the doctrines of religion are so inefficient as to put no actual restraint on your conversation and your doings, then your belief, as to every thing useful and desirable in it, is tantamount to unbelief, and that, though you may not choose to be denominated infidels, yet your alleged faith is not in the least degree better than infidelity. And, therefore, you would do well to consider how far you act wisely or safely in resting satisfied with a distinction in the mere name, when there is no difference in the reality of that which bears so directly on your immortal interests—how far it can avail you to be proof against the charge of *speculative* infidelity, while you lie open at every point of your character to the charge of *practical* infidelity—how far it is consistent with reason or with truth that the religious faith, which we must in charity hold you to be conscious at least of possessing, can cheer you or uphold you in the prospect of that judgement, in which, among other things, you must be presumed to believe, while you must be aware, at the same time, that, at every successive step of your moral career, you are departing farther and farther from the living God who is to judge you.

Ah! my friends, do not thus trifle with common sense, and with true religion, and with your own

souls. At length acknowledge that you have been laboring under a sad delusion. Let us not quarrel about the mere appellation by which you would wish your spiritual state to be denoted. If you must not be called unbelievers, confess at least that you have so much of the "evil heart of unbelief," as that you are of those to whom our Lord will say on the great day of reckoning, "Depart from me; I know you not; Ye are the workers of iniquity." And bear with me, when I address to you, as justly and alarmingly applicable, the admonition of the apostle in my text, and exhort you, as I now do, with all earnestness, to pray most fervently that God would take away from you the evil heart which is at once so unbelieving and so deceitful, that he would give you a new and a better heart, and that he would "fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power."

3. We now adduce the case of those who exhibit, in their practice, the decencies, and honesties, and charities, of a good life, but do so without any regard to the principles of godliness, and the authority of the Gospel.

This is a character which cannot, we think, exist to any great extent; but, in a limited degree, we do sometimes meet with it. And, for the sake of shortening the discussion, we shall suppose it free from any of those palpable defects with which, in its most faultless instances, it is invariably marked, and by which the least sagacious observer may easily distinguish it from the character of a real Christian. We shall suppose that the persons to whom it belongs are not guilty of neg-

lecting any of the ostensible duties of morality, or of practising any of those vices which the letter of the ten commandments forbids. We shall suppose that they exhibit nothing to the eye of their fellow-men, in which transgression can be detected; that they hold forth a visible and a rich display of the more substantial fruits of righteousness; and that, were there no farther inquiry made into the matter, they would be esteemed worthy of the highest approbation of man, and fit for entering into the celestial presence of God. We shall suppose all this; and yet we say that the character thus commending itself to us, may carry in it, in spite of its specious and imposing claims on our admiration, all the reality, and all the guilt, and all the danger of that "evil heart of unbelief," which we see so clearly, and acknowledge so readily, in the case of those who are openly profligate and profane.

You may be equitable in all those dealings and transactions with others, which constitute the business of life. You may be active and liberal in all the labors of private beneficence, and in all the enterprises of public philanthropy. You may be chaste and temperate in your personal deportment. You may be meek amidst the thousand provocations that assail you in your intercourse with the world. And you may be patient under the most severe and complicated and protracted distresses to which humanity is liable. But if the whole of this apparent excellence is created and supported by the power of physical causes, or of worldly motives alone,—if it arises from natural instinctive disposition,—if it is the offspring of

mere self-love,—if it originate in a fictitious sense of honor,—if it be produced by those secular considerations which sometimes induce the avowed infidel to do what is right, and to avoid what is wrong,—if it is to be traced solely to the operation of any, or of all of these circumstances,—then, by what rule of deduction, or by what law of association are we led to infer your belief in Christianity, or so much as ever to think of your having such a belief? If the phenomena of your moral conduct be so fully accounted for by those inferior principles of action with which they are obviously connected, and to which your own consciousness so distinctly and exclusively refers them, what is there in all that you do, that can justify us in having recourse to the hypothesis of your putting faith in the Gospel? If your justice result from the terror of that disgrace, or of that punishment with which society is sure to visit every violation of its acknowledged maxims; if your alms are bestowed for the purpose of gratifying a constitutional tenderness of feeling, or of acquiring that reputation and popularity which seldom fail to be the portion of the bountiful giver; if your personal sobriety is dictated by the fear of losing the advantages of health, and fortune, and a good name, your attachment to which happens to be stronger than your attachment to the gratifications that would have injured them; if your forbearance under provocation arises from a native softness of temperament, or from a cowardly terror of the vengeance of your adversaries, or from a prudent calculation of the benefits that a meek endurance of wrongs secures to him who shows it; if your pa-

tience under affliction resolves itself into sullenness, or insensibility, or pride, or engrossment in the pleasures of a fashionable life, or in the cares of a busy one; if all your good and boasted qualities are to be traced to these and similar sources, then what proof do they afford that the charge of infidelity is laid against you with injustice? Where is there in one of them the least tittle of evidence that you have the belief of the Gospel established in your minds? Which of them evinces the most distant recognition of its influence and authority? From which of them are we to gather that it has any existence, even as an object of your simple apprehension?

Had not Christianity been made known to you, indeed, it is not at all likely that you would have had such a correct and unexceptionable system of practical duty as that which we have supposed you to exhibit; and had we seen nothing more than your outward regard to "whatsoever things are pure and lovely, and of good report," we should have had little hesitation in ascribing it to a "belief of the truth." But now that the mystery of your character is unfolded to us, and that its virtues are known to be derived from such sources as those that we have alluded to, we are no longer left to the exercise of the charity which "believeth all things, and hopeth all things." There is set before us a course of action which has no alliance with Christianity,—which makes no appeal to it as coming from heaven, or as laying any obligations on the inhabitants of the earth,—which would have been pursued though you had been confessedly infidel with regard to the being of a God,

the mission of a Saviour, or the certainty of an eternal retribution,—and which must of necessity have carried in its aspect some tokens of your belief in these things, had not this belief been an utter stranger to your understanding and your heart.

It must be a complete misapprehension of Christianity which prevents any one from discovering, in such conduct as that on which we are now commenting, a striking demonstration of the “evil heart of unbelief.” For Christianity not only prescribes the conduct which you seem to be maintaining,—it also prescribes the principles and motives under whose power that conduct is to be observed at first, and persevered in afterwards; and it gives its sanction and promises its recompense to no conduct but what is thus produced. Its doctrines and its moralities are incapable of being separated, either in the estimation or in the life of the believer. They are systematically united in the record which contains them—united by the relation of cause and effect. The bond of union between them as objects of regard, is belief. And this belief derives from the former that influence which alone is efficacious to generate and to nourish the latter, so as to make them ingredients of the Christian character. Even now, therefore, Christianity disowns you as its votaries in any respect or in any degree: for though you are doing many of those things which it commands, you are not doing them *because* it commands you, and you are not doing them from any reverence for those doctrinal views which it holds out to you as necessary to be entertained, equally for their own sake

and for the sake of giving sincerity and worth to your most virtuous actions. And how shall you be able to stand the trial of the last day, when you shall be judged, "not according to appearances," but according to the rules and maxims of a "righteous judgement"—when "the deeds done in the body" shall be appreciated by their conformity to the will of God, as that will is revealed in the Gospel—when his eye shall not discover in one of your doings a single trace of faith in the message of grace and holiness which he has sent you by Jesus Christ—and when from those very virtues which are gaining for you the applauses of your brethren, and soothing your own hearts with the persuasion that to you there can be no condemnation, he will cause to stand forth that spirit of bold defiance, or that contemptuous indifference to his supreme authority, which will cast upon every one of them the darkest shade of guilt, and seal you over to the fate of those who shall perish because of the "evil heart of unbelief."

It is indeed a gratifying contrast which your character seems to form with that of the ungodly and profligate around you, and it is probable, that *you* may be regarded with as much of general approbation, as there is awarded to *them* of general dissatisfaction and contempt; and yet it may be questioned whether, after all, your infidelity is not more indubitable, and more hopeless, too, than theirs. The immoral man may plead, that impetuous passions and powerful allurements have overborne and subdued his faith, or made him blind to the excellences, and deaf to the claims, of religion. And though this leaves us without any evidence

that he has faith, and though it gives us evidence that he has not faith, still it accounts for his want of it in a way which is consistent with the supposition, not only that he has not finally and in sober purpose cast it away, but that he may sooner or later resume it. It may be said, let his passions once grow cool, and let external allurements be withdrawn, and let him have a fair view of that which he has hitherto rejected, and his faith may revive again, and make him lament his weakness, and wonder at his infatuation. But, in your case, no such explanation can be given—no such plea can be offered—no such hope can be entertained. Your passions, if they have raged, have not, it seems, obtained the mastery. External allurements, if you have been exposed to them, have failed, it seems, to overpower your resolutions, and to corrupt your ways. You retain the correct, and sober, and honorable deportment, from which they attempted and struggled to turn you away. And yet Christianity has had nothing to do in the victory you have achieved, and nothing to do in maintaining the fruits of the conquest you have won. Christianity asserts to herself the sole prerogative of renewing and sanctifying her votaries; but you have sought that renewal and sanctification without her assistance, and without her assistance you think you have obtained them. And you go on in what you imagine is the path of goodness, without the least acknowledgement of her authority, in one word that you utter, or in one action that you perform. Thus calmly, and deliberately, and systematically, you resist the interference of divine revelation; you banish it from the whole plan

of life ; you prefer the exclusive guidance of other lights, and submit to the undivided government of other principles ; and with this consideration before us, how is it possible, I would ask, to suppose that Christian faith has the least footing in your mind ; or what encouragement have we to expect, that it shall ever acquire the ascendancy in a character which is so much pervaded by the spirit of self-complacency, and in which virtue and peace are conceived to have been secured, without any reference to the aid, or to the truth, or to the authority of the Gospel ? Beyond all controversy, there is in you the “evil heart of unbelief ;” and there is every reason to fear, that this “evil heart of unbelief” is likely to remain with you, so long as you dwell with so much satisfaction and confidence on the imagined virtues of your character.

We supposed you, at the outset of our argument, to have a much more unmixed and perfect character than what you could in justice lay claim to. And even on that favorable supposition, it cannot be denied that the charge of unbelief is clearly made out against you. But it will be substantiated still more completely, when we take your character as it really is—as comprehending not only good actions performed on worldly and unchristian principles, but bad actions performed on the same principles, without any regard at all to their conformity or their contrariety to the Gospel. Does not your conscience tell you of many duties neglected, and of many sins committed, upon that very system, through whose operation it is that you also give us the spectacle of many duties discharged, and many sins avoided, and which is

equally independent and unmindful in both cases, of the revelation and will of God? And is not this an additional proof, that any pretensions you can make to the reputation of believers, are wholly groundless and hypocritical? For instance, your love of money makes you moderate in the indulgence of your appetites, and your proud temper renders you patient under suffering. But what if your love of money has also tempted you to defraud an unsuspecting brother, who can never detect your dishonesty; and what if your proud temper has led you to oppress an inferior, who cannot resist, and who dare not complain? Have we not here the most conclusive and irresistible evidence, that those parts of your conduct which correspond with the precepts of Christianity, are just as much animated by the spirit of rebellion against it, as are the most glaring and aggravated of your vices? And what then can we do, but rank you among the abettors of real, though it may be unconscious, as it is unacknowledged, infidelity?

Indeed, my friends, that very character of yours on which you lay so much stress, is, to every intelligent Christian, an evidence against you. For, if you had looked to the Scriptures with a believing eye, you must have seen how far short it comes of what they prescribe, and how grievously you have been deluding yourselves with what is little better than "a name to live," while, as to the moral excellence required of you, you are literally "dead." From your resting satisfied with such low and partial attainments in holiness, we infer

that so far from believing in Christianity, you have not even made yourselves acquainted with its moral system, or that, if you have acquired that knowledge, you have no more respect for it than for the speculations of mere human wisdom. And as you would still impress us with the idea that you have not renounced Christianity, we have a right, and whether the idea be correct or not, it is our duty, to call upon you to go to the light of revelation,⁴ that you may discover the miserable and deep-seated defects which attach to all your boasted virtues—that the deception in which you have been hitherto indulging may be unveiled and removed—that you may have clear and impressive views of the necessity of the Gospel scheme, for saving and sanctifying you as subjects of God's righteous administration—and that thus, by the divine blessing, you may be led to believe with the heart unto righteousness, and be possessed of the reality of that of which, though essential to your happiness both here and hereafter, you have not one satisfactory token, and scarcely the most inconsiderable semblance.

SERMON VI.

SAME TEXT.

4. IN the *fourth* place, we mention those who are characterized by worldly-mindedness.

This implies a devotedness of heart to the objects of sense and time,—a deep-rooted and paramount attachment to the things that are upon the earth, for their own sake, or for the sake of the sensual gratifications which they afford,—an ardent and incessant pursuit of wealth, and pleasure, and honors, and such other temporalities, as the sources of our chief good, and as our chosen portion. Alas! this is no ideal character. It is realized every day in the case of multitudes, and in every various condition of life. And the worst of it is, that they who are distinguished by it, instead of suspecting that the faith of the Gospel has lost its footing in their mind, seem to be as secure and happy as if all were well with them, and as if they had seen their names written in the book of life.

Now, to all such worldlings I would say, you give symptoms of the "evil heart of unbelief," too decisive to be mistaken by any competent observer. There is such a contrariety between your practical system and the system of Christianity, both as to its spirit and its letter, that we do not see how your adherence to the one, and your faith in the other, can co-exist. There is no possible view we can take of Christianity, which does not lead to this conclusion. And that you should think otherwise, is to be attributed to your resting satisfied with vague ideas on the subject, and never taking the trouble to analyze what you profess, and to ascertain the import and effect of its various parts. Just let your attention be directed to a few of the aspects in which it may be considered, and you cannot fail to be sensible how greatly you are deceiving yourselves.

What does Christianity tell you of God? Does it not represent him as worthy of all the homage you can pay to him, and does it not represent him as expressly demanding it all? And yet you withhold it from him, and still say that you believe in him as entitled to it! Nay, more, while you withhold your homage from Him to whom you confess it should, in all duty, and in all consistency, and in all safety, be wholly and cheerfully paid—you give it without reserve to another that is altogether undeserving of it in the least degree, and that you are plainly told cannot receive it from you without involving you in impiety and condemnation. You allow the creature, with all its meanness and corruption, to engross your best affections; and the infinitely perfect Creator to ask

these affections in vain. And notwithstanding this, we must give you credit for believing in the divine record, which forbids such a monstrous preference, and which gives you a demonstration of its sinfulness and its folly, in all that it tells you of that to which the preference is shown, and of him to whom the preference is denied, and which commands you in so many words to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and strength, and mind!"

You pretend, indeed, that though you are immersed in the world, you do not neglect your religious duties. You attend church, and you read your Bible, and you do many other things which your Maker has required. But are you not aware that the divine record tells you that "you cannot serve God and Mammon;" that these two masters cannot be obeyed and loved at the same time, and by the same individual; and that you must make your choice, and give yourselves up to the dominion either of the one or the other? Even without such information, you might have known and felt the impossibility of serving both; but after that impossibility has been declared in Scripture, you cannot surely go on to contradict the declaration in deed, and yet affect that you believe in the declaration as a part of God's own word.

Again, what does Christianity tell you of the Saviour in reference to this subject? It tells you that he died upon a cross for the very purpose of redeeming you from the vain conversation and the corrupting power of the world; and of course, none in whom this effect is not produced, can say that they are partakers of Christ's redemption. But

we see you so much given up to the vain conversation of the world, and so much enslaved by its corrupting power, that you feel no relish for any thing which draws away your attention from it, and scruple not to give it your days and your nights in unwearied succession, and have all the appearance of setting up your everlasting rest in its low and perishing habitations. And is this reconcilable with any measure of faith in the doctrine of the cross? Or can we be so far imposed on as to think that you sincerely believe in the scriptural position of Christ dying for you, that the world might be crucified unto you, and that you might be crucified unto the world?

And what does the preceptive part of revelation say, as to your affections towards the world? It says, "Use this world as not abusing it, knowing that the fashion of all things passeth away." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "Be not conformed to the world." You read this, and you straightway go into the very heart of the world; and you make your chosen companions of the men of the world; and you are terrified at the frown and the ridicule of the world; and you plunge with unbounded license into the gaieties and amusements of the world; and you seek the gains, or court the applauses of the world; and you serve it so zealously and so unremittingly, and you accommodate yourselves so easily to its maxims, and opinions, and fashions, and you are so happy when it smiles upon you, and so miserable when it refuses to minister to your joy, that one would conclude you to

have been created and nurtured solely for the world. And from the very midst of this worldly career, you would make a profession of your faith in the testimony which the law of God has borne against it, and would complain of being misrepresented and calumniated, if we say that you too are cherishing an "evil heart of unbelief!"

But what, let me ask you, is the great and ultimate end of all true religion? Is it not to lift you above this world? Is it not to elevate your ambition to the better world which lies beyond it? And is it not to prepare you for its noble employments and its exalted happiness, by detaching your affections from terrestrial things, and teaching you, even while on earth, to have your conversation in heaven? But can you really be said to believe in such statements while you are pursuing a course which must manifestly and necessarily exclude you from the celestial world to which it points your view, and which involves in it a perfect and complacent satisfaction with a present world, from which it is equally its design and its tendency to wean your attachments?

Say what you will, my friends, it is clear from every aspect in which the matter can be contemplated, that such worldly-mindedness as yours, is utterly incompatible with faith in the religion of Christ. You may try to soothe your consciences with the notion that you are still adhering to its creed, and to its hopes, and to its consolations; but it is all a deception. And it may just as truly be said, that he who falls down every morning and evening to worship the gods of the heathen, which are no gods, has not abjured his confidence

in the one living and true God, as that you who idolize the vices and the vanities of the world—surrendering to them your affections, and devoting to them your lives—are, nevertheless, in the judgment of reason and of the Gospel, free from the “evil heart of unbelief.”

Do not, I beseech you, encourage any longer a notion so contradictory in itself, and so fatal in its consequences. Let your meditations go out upon every part of the Gospel, that you may see how adverse it is, in all its bearings, to worldly-mindedness. And may the Holy Spirit make them instrumental in convincing you of your vital infidelity, and in bringing you, in spite of the world, and in triumph over it, to “believe in God,” and to “believe also in Christ.”

5. We now adduce another illustration, from the case of those who live in the wilful and habitual neglect of religious ordinances.

These are a constituent part of revelation, not superinduced upon it by the wisdom or the superstition of men, but holding an essential place in it, as proceeding from God, and as sanctioned by his authority. They are of divine appointment; and therefore they are entitled to our submission, as much as any thing else in that system in which we find them. Even though we understood nothing of their design, and had experienced nothing of their effect, yet as coming to us enforced by the will of Him who ruleth over all, they demand from us, on this simple ground, a cordial and practical acquiescence. And viewing them in this light, how can we say of any man to whom they are objects of irreverence and contempt, that he,

notwithstanding, gives full credit to the Gospel by which, as by the voice of the Almighty, they are expressly enjoined? Being thus enjoined, they are as intimately connected with the Gospel as are the precepts of the moral law; and so far as conduct is a proof of faith, this proof is wanting, not more in the case of those who violate the latter, than in the case of those who neglect the former. They are both sanctioned by God's authority; and whosoever deliberately tramples upon either of them, tells us as distinctly in deeds as he could have done by words, that with respect to the dispensation which represents them as having that sanction, he has the "evil heart of unbelief."

The only mode by which the force of this argument can be evaded or destroyed, is that of denying the obligation of religious ordinances—denying that they can be fairly discovered in the sacred record, or denying that, though mentioned there, they are mentioned in the form of a requirement, or in such a way as to bring them within the range of Christian duty. If any man can establish this position, or if any man conscientiously holds it, we have nothing more to say so far as he is concerned. But proceeding, as we do, on the supposition that the ordinances of religion have the seal of heaven impressed upon them—that it is God himself by whom they have been instituted—that they are urged upon our respect and our practice by the same high authority which speaks to us, and is recognized by us, in every other department of the Gospel—proceeding on this supposition, we must either conclude that those from whose

scheme of life they are in a great measure or altogether excluded, have not the faith to which they pretend, or we must be prepared to maintain, that a man may live as it seemeth good in his own eyes, and be nevertheless secure against the charge of unbelief.

There is another consideration which deserves notice. The ordinances of religion are evidently instituted for this among other purposes, to preserve and to confirm our faith in the Gospel. In the intention of their Author, they are means for promoting and accomplishing this end. And unless the means be employed, it cannot be expected that the end shall be gained. Besides, when we reflect on their nature and tendency, and on the nature and circumstances of man, we must be sensible that they are admirably calculated, both by their immediate and their indirect operation, to keep alive in his mind the principle of Christian belief; and that something of this description is necessary, not merely to strengthen and animate that principle, but even to maintain its existence amidst inward corruption and surrounding temptations. And it requires no very shrewd observation of what is passing around us, and no very extensive acquaintance with the history of human character, to satisfy us that the ordinary forerunner of immorality and infidelity is a want of due attention to the ordinances of divine institution; and that, even where unbelief has been the primary cause of disregarding them, this disregard to them has, by a natural re-action, rendered the unbelief more settled and complete. When, therefore, we see a person turning his back on the in-

stitutions of the Gospel, and doing so year after year, though we may not be entitled to say that this neglect originated in infidelity, yet we are entitled to infer that it has at length produced this effect; and that, whatever the person may have been at the outset, he has now the "evil heart of unbelief." I must either draw this inference, and rest in it as a correct one, or I must see something in his character and situation, which makes him independent of what Scripture and experience concur in representing as so important for preventing apostacy from the faith of Jesus.

And then it may not be useless to think, for a moment, of the employments which the persons we are speaking of substitute for the observance of Christian ordinances, and for the sake of which they habitually neglect them. They habitually neglect them, that they may engage in the pursuit of wealth, or in the pursuit of sinful pleasure, or in the pursuit of idle amusement. They do it that they may indulge their worldly-mindedness, and their criminal appetites, and their vain imaginations. Or they do it, perhaps, that they may not deserve the imputation of being "righteous overmuch," and may escape the censure or the ridicule of ungodly companions. In short, the statement amounts to this—they habitually neglect the ordinances which Christianity enjoins, that they may give themselves to the gratifications which Christianity forbids. And in the face of all this, how is it possible, on any principle of reasoning or of charity, to exculpate them from the charge of unbelief? Is it possible to see them as careless of perusing the Bible, as if it were all a use-

less fiction; as unmindful of prayer, as if there were no God to whom it might be addressed; as regularly absent from public worship, as if their Maker had rather discouraged than invited their attendance in the sanctuary; as inattentive to sacred exercises on the Sabbath, as if that day had been made to be profaned and not to be kept holy; as neglectful of commemorating the death of Christ, as if Christ had never died to save them, and had never said, "Do this in remembrance of me;"—is it possible to see them guilty of all this practical contempt of the ordinances of the Gospel, and, along with this, devoting the time which these ought to have occupied, to indolence, to recreation, to the world, and to sin; and yet to admit the plea, that faith in Christianity still retains its hold of their understanding or their heart?

If such a plea, in such circumstances, were to be held as good and valid, then there is no proposition in religion, or in morals, however absurd and monstrous, that may not find advocates to support, and judges to sustain it. And, indeed, I should not have thought it necessary to say so much as I have done on so plain a subject, were it not that in all things the heart of man is deceitful—that there is a great laxity, both of sentiment and of conduct, on this point, prevailing in what is called the Christian world—and that we have not a few among us, who exhibit the most contemptuous treatment of Christian institutions, and yet not only deny that they have the "evil heart of unbelief," but bewail, and reprobate, and wonder at, and testify against, the infidelity which they discover in the language and conduct of others.

6. In the *last* place, we mention as another instance, those whose conduct manifests indifference to the preservation and success of Christianity in the world.

I would not by any means be understood to assert, or to insinuate, that every one who takes an active part in defending or in propagating the Gospel, is a true believer, and may hope for salvation. This, we fear, is not an uncommon idea; but it is, withal, utterly groundless, and most delusive; and, instead of giving it any degree of countenance, I would carefully warn you against it, as equally erroneous and dangerous. You may give your pecuniary aid and your personal labors to the cause, and your zeal, and diligence, and liberality, may procure for you the most extravagant praises which the pen of flattery ever recorded; and yet there may be in you such an "evil heart of unbelief;" as will render all your richest gifts, and all your most bustling activity, no better than the "sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal."

But though I would protest against the notion, equally mistaken and mischievous, that all is well with you, merely because you bestow much, and labor much, for upholding and for diffusing the religion of Christ, I would also endeavor to impress it upon you, that there cannot well be faith in those who take no concern in its prosperity. Supposing that a man professed to believe, not merely that we have a civil constitution, but that it is incomparably excellent, and of vast importance to our welfare, and that it has claims on his support, arising from these circumstances, and from the

actual benefit he has enjoyed under its fostering protection; and supposing it to be menaced by foreign aggression, or by internal hostility, which he has it in his power to repel,—would you consider his profession as sincere, if yet he did not exert himself to sustain it in the midst of its perils? Or, rather, would you not brand him with disloyalty, and at once pronounce him to have been hypocritical in all the declarations he had made? But suppose him farther to profess his belief, that this civil constitution is equally adapted to all mankind; that its blessings could be conveyed to others without injuring or impoverishing ourselves; and that it is one of its obvious and acknowledged principles, that its subjects should be eager to diffuse it among all the tribes and kingdoms of the earth; and that one of its characteristic properties is, to infuse into those who live under its sway, a spirit of the warmest and most disinterested benevolence to the people of other countries,—would you give credit to his professions, if you saw him indifferent whether it ever got a more extensive establishment in the world, making no voluntary exertions for that purpose, refusing to unite with those who were doing so, and rather setting himself in opposition to their honest and generous endeavors?

Now apply this to the subject before us, and let me ask you, what greater credit is due to those who profess to believe in Christianity, and in the face of this profession, do nothing for the cause of Christianity? If they truly believe in Christianity, they must believe it to be of divine origin—they must believe it to be full of interest and

importance to every human being—they must believe it to be intended by its great author to be of universal benefit—they must believe it to be the cause of God, and of truth, and of mankind—they must believe it to be a system of compassion, a system which shows compassion to *them*, which requires them to have compassion on others, and which holds it out as the highest style of compassion, that they vindicate its honor, and spread its influence—and they must believe, that for the manner in which they treat it, both as it respects themselves and their fellow-men, they must render a strict account to him who is to “judge the quick and the dead.” Their faith, if they have faith, must include all this; but what if, professing to have such faith, that system on which it is avowedly fixed secures from them no active interference in its behalf? What if they sit and hear, unmoved, the blasphemy and the derision with which its adversaries assail it in their presence? What if they put forth no energy in order to stem the torrent of infidelity which may be threatening to overwhelm it? What if they turn a deaf ear to those ignorant and helpless sinners that are beseeching them to impart it for their instruction and their salvation? What if they withhold their countenance and aid from those institutions which have it for their object to circulate the knowledge and increase the influence of Christianity at home and abroad? What if they embrace none of the various opportunities that are afforded them in the course of Providence, of widening its dominion? What if they feel and express no joy when they hear of the triumphs which it is gaining over eve-

ry thing that exalts itself against God, that enslaves the conscience and degrades the condition of man? And what if, in wantonness or malignity, they oppose the labors of the Christian philanthropist, and brand him with the stigma of fanaticism, and hold him up to the ridicule and contempt of a world already too willing to laugh at those who care for the souls and the eternity of their brethren, and thus try to paralyze every generous effort for the cause of the Gospel, and to doom the race of Adam to that idolatry and superstition, that sin and misery, from which it was revealed to rescue them? What does all this mean, and what can it mean, but that the persons alluded to have no real conviction of Christianity—that if they think they have, they are somehow or other deceiving themselves—that they have the “evil heart of unbelief?”

I would be far from saying, indeed, that this charge is applicable to any man, merely because he does not adopt the precise methods of supporting or propagating Christianity which others have proposed to him—because he does not enter into this scheme to-day, and into that scheme to-morrow—because he does not join this Bible Society and that Missionary Society—because he does not attend a sermon for this spiritual purpose, and a meeting for that spiritual purpose—because he will not give money at one time, and active service at another—because, in short, he will not submit to be guided and controlled in all his movements by those who choose to be dictators in the field of Christian benevolence. Such modes of judging, we lament to say, are sometimes practis-

ed ; but they are uncandid, unjust, and injurious ; and I would equally deprecate and avoid them. I leave every man to the exercise of his own discretion as to the plans he is to adopt, the means he is to employ, the efforts he is to make, for promoting the interests of Christianity. I only desiderate that he shall keep these interests in view, and that he shall pursue them : I desiderate this as an essential evidence of his faith ; and if he is destitute of this evidence, I feel myself necessitated to conclude, that he has the “evil heart of unbelief.” And I put it to the judgement of every one of you to say, if the conclusion be not legitimate and irresistible.

You may not have hitherto considered the subject in this light, and you may be still unwilling to view it in this light. But surely, if you do nothing for supporting the religion of Christ when it is attacked, or for communicating it to those who have it not—if you do not rejoice in the conquests which it achieves over its enemies—if you assist in loading with obloquy and scorn such of your fellow-men as are zealously affected in the work of evangelizing the earth—if you even withhold your aid from those institutions we have referred to, merely because you love your money better than your Saviour, or than those for whom your Saviour died—and if your recollection does not furnish you with any instances in which, by means of religious truth, you have attempted to “save a soul from death, and to hide a multitude of sins”—then how is it possible that you can, with any consistency, be said to have believed with your heart in the Gospel of divine truth—the Gospel

of eternal salvation—the Gospel of compassion and of love? Possessing a scheme of philosophy, in whose tendency to advance the improvement of the species you had every degree of confidence—possessing a discovery in one of the common arts of life, from the communication of which you would anticipate an accession of comfort and prosperity to the people—possessing a medical preparation, of whose efficacy in curing diseases, heretofore deemed hopeless, you had a perfect conviction—would not your belief in all these things determine you to make them known, and to bring them into beneficial operation as widely as possible? And what can we say for you, if, professing to believe in the truth, and necessity, and efficacy of the gospel, as a system of eternal redemption for the human race, you are at no pains to give it circulation and effect? What can we say for you, but that your profession is vain, and that there lodges beneath it “an evil heart of unbelief?”

Thus have we endeavored to illustrate our statement, by adducing a variety of appropriate illustrations. And now, methinks, some of you will be ready to exclaim, “this is a hard saying; who can hear it? We flattered ourselves that we were all believers, and in the course of this discussion, you have made it out that we are all infidels.” No, my beloved brethren; I trust not. I trust there are many of you who “believe with the heart,” and who “believe to the saving of the soul.” But I wish to draw aside the veil with which you are so apt to cover the worst defects of your character; and to let in the light of truth upon them, so that you may be qual-

ified to judge accurately of your real condition, and that you may be urged to provide for your safety by discovering your danger. I have addressed myself to your understandings, and have assigned my reasons for the conclusions I have drawn. And if these reasons be unsatisfactory, by all means let the conclusions be rejected and go for nothing. But if the argument be sound, do not resist the inference, because it humbles your pride, and makes you less in love with yourselves, and less confident in your eternal prospects, than you were before. Nothing could have induced me to give such an enlarged application to my subject, or to have brought forward such an apparently sweeping accusation, or to have announced such a broad and comprehensive inference, but my anxiety for your spiritual welfare. And remember how deeply you are interested in all that has been said. It refers to what should be most precious to you—the salvation of your soul. It is intended to caution you against reposing in the possession of that ambiguous or superficial character, which is too often all that is aimed at, and too often all that is acquired. It is intended to lead you to the cultivation of that truly Christian character which has faith for its master principle, and embodies that principle in every one of its doings, and displays that consistency of conduct with profession, which is the only and the never failing index to real conviction. The object is of vast importance to your present and eternal well being, and deserves your most serious consideration. For if you have the mere appear-

ance, not the reality of faith, or if you are living in the supposition that you have it when you have it not, you cannot make the improvement, nor enjoy the peace which Christianity secures to its votaries upon earth. And when you stand before the bar of God, it will be of no avail to you, that you thought yourselves believers, and that you were esteemed believers by an evil and flattering world, while, in truth, the eye of Omniscience saw you cherishing the "evil heart of unbelief."

This may be all true, and yet you may still think that you believe. If, however, you will examine yourselves, you will find that your thinking so is nothing more than self-deception, and may be accounted for on various suppositions. Perhaps you have received, in some good degree, a Christian education, and the effect of this early discipline still continues with you so far, as that you retain that feeling of respect for religion which had been carefully impressed upon your youthful mind, and which, by the very natural error of taking the sign for the thing signified, you have set down for an acquiescence in its truth. Perhaps you are in the habit, from secular motives, of attending with punctuality on the public ordinances of the gospel, and in this way give an apparent recognition, which may easily be mistaken for a real conviction, of its importance and authority. Perhaps you have once believed, and your faith not having been formally thrown off, but gradually and insensibly destroyed by various causes, you may feel its old impressions coming back upon you, and, though the

mere visitants of your memory or your fancy, like the recollections of a reverie, or the illusions of a dream, they may half persuade you that you are believers still. Perhaps you have a vague idea that there is such a thing as religion, and perhaps you go a little farther, and suffer yourselves to think more precisely and definitely of some of its articles, and allow that there is a God, and that the soul is immortal, and that Christ is a Saviour, and that there is a certain connexion between this world and the next; and all this does look somewhat like faith, and in consequence of resembling, is permitted to pass for it. Perhaps the various doctrines of Christianity have come before you in the shape of abstract propositions, with which you have got well acquainted, and which you are contented with not denying, and which you know to be revered by many of your fellow-men, and to which it would be accounted indecent to signify any dislike, or to proclaim any hostility; and this passive, speculative contemplation of them is, without difficulty, construed into an acknowledgement of their truth. Perhaps, in your intercourse with Christians, you have, from complaisance, or from some similar motive, so often spoken of the gospel as a system of divine origin, and of incalculable moment, that your verbal testimony has set itself down in your recollection as the expression of real sentiment, and you have come at length to look upon yourselves as adherents to the faith of Christ. Perhaps you are accustomed to regard Christianity as a very useful thing for mankind in general, because it leads them into habits of sobriety, and honesty, and

peaceableness, which they would not otherwise cherish; and there is such a close affinity between a conviction of its necessity for others, and a credence of its truth in one's self, that the former may be easily enough confounded with the latter, or considered as equivalent to it. Or, perhaps, you have been accustomed to regard religion as highly expedient, and even indispensably necessary for keeping the people in due subordination, and to hold it as, on that account, an essential part of the political system of every country and of every period of the world; and from your reverence for it as a great state engine, you have come to contemplate it, and to speak of it, as if you deemed it an unequivocal and momentous verity.

These suppositions may help to explain the inconsistency of your imagining and saying that you believe, while you give to others the most irrefragable proofs that you do not believe. And if you will only consider them with an impartial application to yourselves, and if, along with this, you will recollect, that true faith looks not merely to the temporal usefulness, but to the spiritual nature and tendency of the gospel; not merely to its indubitable truth, but to its infinite importance; not merely to its general claims on the regard of men, but to the individual and necessary interest that you have in it; not merely to the doctrines and precepts which it contains, but to the requisition that it makes of your assent to the one, and your obedience to the other; not merely to certain parts of it which taste, or inclination, or prejudice, may prefer; but to its whole system,

as intended for the government of your principles and conduct, and to all its bearings on your future and eternal destiny ;—you will be forced to acknowledge, that as to every one of the characters we have hypothetically imparted to you, there can be no reasonable doubt, and no way of escaping the conclusion, that you have that very thing against which the apostle warns you—the “evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.”

I am far from intending to reduce all those against whom this charge may be brought, to the same level. I do not mean to assert, that the various classes of persons I have described, are equally advanced in the paths of irreligion. There is no propriety, and no justice, in confounding the distinctions which evidently obtain among them. But surely it is a poor consolation which is derived from certain differences subsisting as to the number and locality of the symptoms, while the disease itself is ascertained to exist in every one of the cases, without doubt, and without exception. If you are proved to have the “evil heart of unbelief,” let not your attention be occupied with the mere diversities of character which, in this respect, distinguish you from one another. Let the sole object of your consideration be, the great substantial fact, with regard to which these diversities are comparatively mere trifles. Let no circumstances whatever be allowed to conceal or to extenuate it. Look at it in all its certainty, and in all its effects. And be persuaded to adopt those measures which every wise man would have have recourse to, who discovers that he has been

hitherto blinded to his real situation, and who is now made to see, that whatever there is of guilt, and whatever there is of danger, in infidelity, just as surely attaches to him as it does to those who have openly renounced the doctrine and the yoke of Christ.

SERMON VII.

SAME TEXT.

IN the present discourse, we shall consider the sinful nature and awful consequences of unbelief, as to the person to whom it attaches. The doctrine we maintain is this, that unbelief is a state of mind truly and strictly sinful; and that those who cherish it, are liable to punishment proportioned to its native guilt, and its aggravating accompaniments.

Infidels, in general, think so little of their responsibility for any thing, and are so much accustomed to indulge in uncontrolled speculation, and look upon the principles of religion so confidently and habitually as mere absurdities, that they cannot be brought to consider the subject as involving a moral question, or made to see that their rejection of any doctrine whatever, can fix upon them the quality of guilt. And many of those who profess the Gospel, seem to imagine that

there is no delinquency in relation to it, except what arises from contradicting its precepts, after admitting its truth ; and that those who deny its truth are culpable, not for that denial, but only for those violations of the law of nature which it may occasion, or for those actions which would have been criminal, whether there had been a revelation or not.

Both, however, are mistaken in holding such an opinion. Christianity, which the infidel rejects, is a revelation from heaven. It is not a mere human speculation, of whose merits we are left to judge for ourselves, and which we may admit or disregard at our pleasure. It is not a mere collection of facts, and doctrines, and precepts, presented to us we know not how, or wherefore, or from whom, and with every part of which we may use the most unlimited freedom, innocently, and with impunity. It is not a rule of faith and duty communicated to us by a being to whom we do not stand in the relation which requires submission, or to whose enactments resistance might be rather a virtue than a crime. It is a divine message. It declares the will of Him who has all power and all perfection dwelling in him. It refers to our salvation from the sin and misery in which apostacy has involved us. God expressly commands us to believe it. And he lays the burden of our eternal state upon our believing or not believing it, according to his injunction. "This is his commandment, that ye believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." And "he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; the wrath

of God abideth upon him." This is the view which Christianity itself gives us ; and we are not permitted to take any other, or to reason upon any other. But from such a view it necessarily results, that those who reject Christianity disobey the God of heaven and earth,—disobey him in a case in which submission is unequivocally and peremptorily demanded,—disobey him as to that in which we are called on by our submission to do honor to every one of the perfections which adorn his great and glorious character. And disobedience to God is that which constitutes the very essence of sin, and subjects the creatures who are chargeable with it to a sentence of condemnation.

It is very true, there can be no sin in disbelieving that for which there is not sufficient evidence. Our Creator has so formed us, that the mind cannot give its assent to a proposition which, however true and important in itself, is not supported by evidence proper in its kind, and adequate in its degree. And to withhold the assent, in such circumstances, from the gospel, can imply no want of reverence to Him who is at once the author of that gospel, and the author of our nature. But then the remark has no correct application to the subject before us. For when God commands us to believe the gospel, he commands us to believe that which he has at the same time accompanied with proofs, numerous, various, and conclusive. They are proofs which have convinced multitudes in the ages that are past, and which, so far as they themselves are concerned, are sufficient, and more than sufficient, to convince every man to

whom they are presented. This, indeed, may be denied; and when it is denied, we can only reiterate our assertion, and appeal to a particular consideration of every thing which we are wont to adduce for substantiating the truth of Christianity; and then maintain, that if belief is still withheld, there is, in some shape or other, a resistance to the authority of God.

But as it may not be very obvious how this can be fairly maintained, so as to implicate unbelievers in sin on account of their unbelief, we offer the following observations:—

In the *first* place, before the reasons that are held out for believing in Christianity can be productive of that effect, they must be attended to. They must not merely exist, or be known to exist; but they must be made the subject of thought and of study, and applied to the purpose for which they have been provided. And unless this be done, they might just as well have been withheld, and room given for the complaint that men are required to have faith, without a proper foundation being given them on which to build it. Now, to all such as neglect the evidences of Christianity—as will not examine them, and try their force and sufficiency, we are entitled to say; “You disbelieve Christianity—but your unbelief is not owing to the want of evidence; it is owing to your own want of consideration; and till you give it this consideration,—till you be at due pains to inform yourselves of its different parts, and of their different bearings,—till you have taken this necessary step for determining the question, and in consequence of taking that step, have

decided against the gospel;—till this be done, we must hold you to be guilty of disobedience to God, who commands you to believe the gospel, and gives you evidence to support and justify your faith.”

In the *second* place, the reasons that are afforded to you for believing in Christianity must be studied, and weighed, and decided upon, without prejudice. Without an impartial investigation, an equitable decision is not to be expected; and if your investigation be entered into, and conducted, under the influence of prepossessions which bear against Christianity, it is next to impossible that the best evidence should succeed in commanding your assent; and the want of success must, in that case, be attributed to that unfair and blameable state of mind in which you prosecuted your inquiry. If you allowed yourselves to be under bondage to the opinions of its learned adversaries; if your intellectual pride had resolved to make every mysterious proposition an argument against it; if your previous attachment to a system of opinions was so strong, as to make you look with jealousy and dislike on whatever stood opposed to it, even in a revelation from heaven; if the moral habits you had acquired were repugnant to its pure and holy precepts, and so inveterate that you could not think of relinquishing them on any account; if you have judged of the claims of Christianity on your belief, with such views, and feelings, and resolutions as these, and if these have been the cause of your finding it unworthy of your belief, then your rejection of it, being the result of culpable or sinful prejudices,

must still be resolved into disobedience to God, and expose you to his displeasure.

In the *third* place, the reasons which are presented to you for believing in Christianity, must not only be considered, and candidly considered, they must also be *patiently* considered. If your attention be directed to them only for a little while; if you grow weary of the task, because you are not speedily satisfied; if the difficulties you meet with discourage you, and ere long induce you to abandon it; if an indolent disposition prevents you not only from making vigorous efforts at first, but from persevering in it afterwards; if some secular pursuit is permitted to divert your attention from it, and you leave it undone, that you may follow the business or the pleasure of the world; and if you continue in scepticism or infidelity, in consequence of a failure in your inquiries for which you can offer no valid excuse, here also you must stand accused of disobedience to the will of God; nor can you rebut the accusation with any decency or propriety, while it is evident that you have been more sparing of your time, and of your trouble, and of your patience, in examining the credentials of those who pretended to have a divine commission, and whose message was of the very last importance, than you would have been with any thing that affected your bodily comfort or your outward prosperity.

Having mentioned these points, I think that I have mentioned the causes of almost all the infidelity that prevails. Wherever these causes are allowed to operate, infidelity is the natural consequence. And surely it is not to be questioned,

that the infidelity which originates in such causes must be sinful. It is not the result of circumstances over which the individuals who have embraced it had no control, and in which their moral dispositions and purposes had no willing participation. It is the result of certain qualities of mind and character of which they had the management, for the management of which they are responsible, and to which they have given such a direction and such an influence as has succeeded in making them reject the counsel of God ; and, therefore, it will form a part of their reckoning in the great day of the Lord, just as much as any other violation of the divine commandments, which they did not avoid, because they did not choose to make a proper use of their faculties, and to shun or resist the temptations to which they were exposed.

I can, indeed, conceive the case of a man inquiring carefully, candidly, and patiently into the truth of the gospel ; and yet unable to arrive at any thing like a clear or decided conviction of its being a revelation. I can conceive the case of a man so situated. And such a man I would reverence for his conscientious dealings with the subject. I would pity him for the painful misgivings and distressing doubts which adhere to his inquiry. And I would cherish the hope, that he might yet see his way through all the difficulties and obstructions which are keeping him back from the Saviour, and that he might yet fall down and worship, saying, " Lord, I believe, help mine unbelief."

But, alas ! though it be possible to imagine a thing of this kind taking place, what reason have we for thinking that it is ever realized? From all that we see, and from all that we know of infidelity, we should conclude that examples of such perfect ingenuousness of mind on the part of those who have embraced it, do never in fact occur, or that their occurrence is so extremely rare as not to affect our argument. Even where an individual flatters himself that he is using all diligence and candor on the subject, it may be that he is as much the victim of some unhappy prejudices, as he is who is conscious of his prejudices, and wilfully and knowingly influenced by them. And in all such instances the individual must be regarded as accountable for his unbelief.

Indeed, when we recollect how much our belief in testimony, and all other kinds of evidence adduced for the truth of any fact or averment whatever, depends on the attention we pay to the evidence, and the feelings with which we regard the thing that is to be proved, and our anticipation of the consequences that will follow our admission of it ;—when we recollect how much this happens in all cases, we cannot fail to perceive that it must be peculiarly incident to the case of religion. Such is the nature of Christianity, and such are the relations which our feelings and our interests bear to it, as a system of doctrine and of duty, that it seems quite impossible to render the study of its evidences a purely intellectual process. It necessarily involves in it, at every stage of our proceeding, a moral process also: And for this

reason, we are as answerable for the conclusion to which we come, as if that conclusion were a mere and immediate expression of the will. When I think evil, or speak evil of any person, I may be speaking or thinking in strict conformity to the bearings of the evidence that is before me, respecting his conduct; and yet my judgement of him may be altogether unjust; and not only so, but if I have not taken sufficient pains to obtain the evidence that exists, or have not given it a deliberate and impartial consideration, or have allowed myself to pervert any part of it, I am as really liable to censure for the judgement I have formed, as I would have been, had I rejected all inquiry, and all guidance, and given a dogmatical and unfavorable decision at once. The application of this obvious maxim to the case before us is plain, and cannot be mistaken. And therefore it is rational and just that every man should be deemed responsible for his unbelief, and that, in certain circumstances, it should be pronounced sinful, and subject the person holding it to condemnation and punishment. Hence it is that God *commands* us to believe. He accompanies the commandment with sufficient evidence for the truth of what he proposes to our faith. And his commandment refers to our giving a suitable reception and a becoming treatment to that evidence. If we give it such a reception and such a treatment, the result will be belief. If we receive and treat it in a different, or improper and unjustifiable way, the result will be unbelief. And this being the immediate and certain result of what is unquestionably an abuse of our moral and intellectual powers, as applied

to that to which divine authority requires that we shall apply them without any such abuse, it follows as a matter of course, that our unbelief is truly and substantially an act of disobedience to God; in other words, it is a sinful act, and exposes the transgressor to the penalty of a broken law.

Now, my friends, if unbelief be thus sinful, think how great that sinfulness is, and how dreadful must be the punishment with which it shall be visited. Christianity, which unbelievers reject, is a message from God; and, considered simply as a message from God, how much disrespect to the divine authority—what a daring contempt of the divine majesty does it imply! And independently of the nature or purpose of the message, what an awful condemnation will the mere refusal of it bring upon their guilty heads! But deeper is their guilt, and more awful their condemnation, when we recollect what that message is which they spurn away from them. It is a message of grace: It conveys to them the offer of pardon, reconciliation, and eternal life: It makes a complete provision for their deliverance from hell, and for their final exaltation to heaven. In refusing the gospel, therefore, they refuse to be saved. They deliberately prefer a continuance in that state of alienation from God, and of liability to everlasting destruction, in which disobedience has already placed them. And continuing in that state, they must inevitably perish. And all that they shall suffer as sinners, must be aggravated tenfold by the reflection, that they suffer because they despised the redemption that was provided for them

—because they shut their eyes against the light of heaven, and their ears against the voice of heaven, and their hearts against the mercy of heaven —because they persevered in infidelity, in despite of all the tenderness with which God entreated them, and in defiance of all the authority with which he commanded them, to believe in one who “was mighty, and able to save them to the very uttermost.”

I know that all this is likely enough to share the same fate with the whole of that doctrine which they have rejected, and to furnish materials for their profane ridicule, instead of awakening them to a sense of their guilt and their danger. But whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, it is our duty to proclaim the truth. It may come to pass that the Spirit of God shall send it home with efficacy to their souls, and make them tremble and cry out with the jailor at Philippi, “What must we do to be saved?” Our statement, however, is chiefly for warning to those who believe and are in danger of apostasy, and to those whose hearts, though somewhat tinctured with the principles of unbelief, are not yet hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and not yet under bondage to the despotism of infidelity. To all such we particularly address ourselves. We would inculcate what we have said upon the one class, that they may avoid any approach even to the confines of that guilty system, and “keep their confidence steadfast unto the end.” We would inculcate it upon the other class, that they may be induced to pause and to reflect before they advance farther in the pathway of their departure from the living God,

and that by means of their remaining sense of the things which belong to their peace, they may be persuaded by the terrors, as well as by the compassions of the Lord, to return to him, and depart no more. And we would inculcate it upon both classes, that whatever part they may hereafter act, and whatever fate they may hereafter undergo, it may not be said that any portion of the counsel of God was withheld from them, and that they were not told by those who "watched for their souls," of the personal guilt and danger in which every infidel is involved. We proclaim this to you without disguise and without reserve, that unbelief is not a mere error of the judgement, but a deadly crime in the heart; that when its abettors talk of an insufficiency of evidence, it is only a cloak to cover their conscious enmity to the truth, or a delusion into which moral corruption has seduced them; that every one who rejects the gospel commits an act of disobedience to God, involving in it contempt of his high authority, and ingratitude for his richest mercy; and that along with all the enemies of the Most High, they "shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

My friends, I ask you not at present to look to the life which infidels lead, for a proof of the guilt and the misery which are brought upon them by their peculiar tenets. You may see them decent and amiable in their outward deportment, and you may see them as tranquil or as joyful as if they had a "conscience void of offence towards God and towards man." And though there are doubtless moments in which they have misgivings and

horrors of mind, from which it requires all the abstraction of philosophy, and all the gaieties of the world to divert their attention, yet upon the whole it may happen, that you shall not discover any marked difference between them and the disciples of a better school.

Neither do I ask you to think of the death-bed of infidels. We can conceive them dying in composure from thoughtlessness, or with satisfaction from particular views which they have contrived to hold fast of a future state and of the divine mercy, and even in such an easy frame of mind as to jest almost with their last breath on the change they are about to undergo. A death-bed scene is by no means the proper test of their situation. And yet there is one view of it which is worthy of being noticed. A real Christian was never heard to lament at the hour of dissolution, that he had feared the Lord, and believed in Jesus, and walked according to his gospel;—all his regret has been, that his endeavors to do so had been so imperfect, and that he had so often neglected his God and Saviour. But we have never known that it is customary for infidels to congratulate themselves, at their expiring moments, that they had thrown off the yoke of Christianity, to express joy that they had not been so weak as to confide in its doctrines and promises, and to counsel their families and their friends to become or to continue infidels like themselves. But notwithstanding this, the death of infidels does not let us in to their real condition. As they might not have been “plagued like other men” in their life, so they may

have no "bands in their death." Our opinion of their state must not depend on what they feel or do not feel: but on what they really are now, and on what they are really to be hereafter. And it is enough for us to know, that in consequence of their not believing on the Son of God, they have sinned and are condemned already; that the calmness with which they may breathe their last is but the stilly presage of a coming storm; and that even though the glance of triumph should lighten up their eye, as it closes upon this mortal scene, it shall open at the last day on the terrors of an incensed God, and on the wrath of a despised Redeemer, and on the "vengeance of eternal fire."

But our illustration cannot stop here. If you are unbelievers, that in itself is a great sin, and draws after it a grievous and overwhelming judgment. But the sin and its penalty assume a more lowering and frightful aspect, when we think of the effect of your infidelity upon others. Even though you have no wish or no intention to propagate your opinions, and use no endeavors for the purpose of giving them circulation, you move in a certain sphere of intercourse, and consequently of influence. Your language will be heard when you "speak out of the abundance of your heart;" your conduct will be observed when you walk "in the ways that are not good;" by some means or other your sentiments will be known, and you will be quoted, perhaps, where you least expected it, to justify the unbelief of others, and to encourage them in their departure from the living God; and if you live long in the world, it may happen that

the crimes which you condemn, and the miseries which you deplore around you, shall be discovered to be the fruit of your own example. And surely it is a heinous and alarming feature of the case, that there should be any of your fellow-men who can trace their unbelief to *you*, and whom you have been thus instrumental in corrupting and destroying. It is dreadful to think, that since this is the effect which your infidelity has a tendency to produce, you can scarcely fail to have been the cause of such serious and irreparable wrongs to your fellow-creatures; and that, however obscurely you have lived, and however cautious you have been in giving currency to your sentiments, there are probably some—probably many, who are suffering now from that circumstance, and who shall suffer from it for ever. And is it not more painful and alarming still, that though you should at length become sensible of your error, and be anxious to repair the injuries you have inflicted, you know not who they are that have become the victims of your unbelief; and that after you have become alive to the atrocity of what you have done, or been the means of doing, some individual in a distant land, or in your very neighborhood—some individual whom you once loved, and who loved you in return—some individual for whose safety you would give the wealth of worlds, is expiring in the agonies of despair, and cursing you with his latest breath as the author of his ruin.

That indeed is bad, but the worst feature of the case still remains to be noticed—deliberate attempts to destroy the faith of others. Whenever infidelity is the confirmed habit of the mind, this is

likely to be the habitual expression of it. When associated, indeed, with strong suspicions of its unsoundness, or when united with mild and amiable dispositions, or when connected with thoughtless and inconsiderate gaiety, or when existing along with a conviction of the political expediency and necessity of religion, it may have no great tendency to propagate itself with the intention of him who holds it. But let it occur along with an unfeeling and malignant temper, whether that temper be original, or produced by its hardening influence—let it be accompanied with a fondness for displaying intellectual acumen and superior learning—or let the person who holds it have a talent for ridicule—and then it will manifest itself in frequent and assiduous endeavors to make others renounce their partiality for religion, and range themselves among its adversaries.

But, independently of these considerations, the mind which has embraced infidelity must naturally and in general be inclined to diffuse it. I speak not here of the effect of sincerity on those who have embraced it, though certainly if they are sincere, and have any love to what they deem truth, they should not in duty and in kindness confine the discovery and advantages of it to themselves. I speak not of such, because I am persuaded that the effect of sincerity is much modified by a secret consciousness, that in this case, truth and charity are at variance. But I refer to the inclination which every one feels to defend opinions which he knows to be generally obnoxious, and which tend to lower his character in the estimation of most people, and to injure his name and his

character in the world ; and which defence is to be accomplished, not merely by vindicating his particular opinions when they are formally attacked, but by frequently introducing them into discussion, and by provoking the controversy, so as to have an opportunity of showing how much argument is on his side, and with what ability he can maintain it, and by laboring to make proselytes to the system which he knows and feels to be offensive and hateful. This must be in general the inclination of the infidel. It is an inclination which he must have many opportunities of gratifying. And when he meets, as he will often do, with the ignorant, the young, the weak, and the unstable, the prospect of succeeding in his endeavors to shake or weaken their faith, will tempt him, above all his powers of self-denial or of pity, to assail them with his insinuations, and his objections, and his ridicule against the religion of Christ.

In speaking of the guilt which is contracted by those who thus, in the wantonness or in the malignity of their own unbelief, endeavor to draw others into the same state of alienation from God and from hope, we are at a loss for words sufficiently strong and emphatic to express its enormity. An infidel philosopher has observed, that "the damnation of one man is an infinitely greater evil than the subversion of a thousand millions of kingdoms." This is a testimony which he has borne against himself, and against all in every age who make light of the well-being of that imperishable spirit which the Almighty has breathed into the human frame. "The subversion of a thousand

millions of kingdoms !” Aye ; he might have converted his kingdoms into worlds, and his thousand millions into countless myriads, and still might he have said, that the damnation of one man is an infinitely greater evil. They are to one immortal soul as less than the small dust of the balance. With all the marks of divine perfection enstamped on them, they yet have no conscious existence—and are susceptible neither of pain nor pleasure—and are but the material instruments which God has created for the gratification or the improvement of the intelligent beings that inhabit them. It is *their* fate to pass away as if they had never been ; but the soul shall endure ; and after they shall have been blotted out from the wide expanse of universal nature, as having served the purposes of their formation, the soul shall still survive, and stretch out its existence into everlasting ages, and spend that eternity to which it is destined, either under the burden and the anguish of a just condemnation, or in the enjoyment of exalted, unmingled, and never-ending bliss.

It is to the forfeiture of this bliss, and to the infliction of that condemnation, that the soul is doomed, when it casts off its allegiance to God, and bids an infidel defiance to the revelation of his will. And, O, how “red like crimson” is the sin of that man, who, not contented with being himself involved in such a fate, industriously and cruelly labors to carry along with him his brethren and his fellow-men into the same “place of torment !” We condemn the midnight depredator who invades the property of his neighbor, and steals away the gold that perisheth. And in what

terms ought we to reprobate that infinitely worse than midnight depredator, who, by the intrusion of his infidel opinions, has robbed the ingenuous youth of that peace of mind and purity of character which were dearer to him than all beside, denuded him of every hope that brightened his future prospects, and sent him down to perish in the pit of destruction! We eye with horror, and speak with loudest indignation of the wretch who imbrues his hands in the blood of a fellow-creature, and thus depriving him of life, cuts off the father of a family, and the benefactor of a neighborhood. And what should be our feelings of horror, and what our language of indignation, regarding the still baser and more remorseless wretch, who murders the very soul of his associate or his friend, by plunging its faith, and purity, and expectations, into the abyss of infidelity, and giving it over to the "worm that never dies, and to the fire that shall never be quenched," and who spreads the deadly mischief as far as his arm can reach, or his influence extend!

If there be any now hearing me who are conscious of having in one instance attempted the perpetration of such an atrocious crime, let them repent in dust and ashes; and if they see the success of their attempt in the acknowledged or practical infidelity of the individual against whom it was made, let their penitence be still sadder and deeper; and let them hasten, before death puts his negative upon all human activity, to repair the spiritual ruin they have so cruelly effected; and by their wisest instructions, their warmest remonstrances, their best example, and their most fer-

vent and affectionate prayers, to deliver the victim of their infidel seduction “out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay,” and again to “set his feet upon the rock” of ages. Let them *hasten* to do this, lest the opportunity be suddenly and for ever lost—and then what ground of hope can they have that they shall “go away into life eternal,” when through their wicked and deliberate instrumentality, even one human being is made to go away “into everlasting punishment?”—“Whoso shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me,” said Christ, “it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” And, O think how much it will add to the pangs of your future misery, when you recollect amidst what you suffer for your own unbelief, the state of those whom you had led astray from their God and Saviour, and left to follow you to your dark abodes; and when if, from selfishness or from pity, you should pray that one might be sent to them from the other world to warn them of their danger, it would be said, in accents that would kindle up a still fiercer flame in your agonized bosom, “If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead!”

SERMON VIII.

SAME TEXT.

I COME now to apply the subject I have been discussing, by addressing myself to various classes of persons with respect to infidelity, considered as an evil which either they themselves should carefully avoid, or which they may be the means of counteracting or of curing in the case of others.

1. I begin with those who stand in the relation of parents.

Of so much importance is the wise and faithful discharge of your peculiar duties, that if these were attended to as they ought to be, I should have little fear of checking the progress of infidelity, and of securing for religion that practical ascendancy to which it is entitled. It may be said, without much exaggeration, that upon you every thing depends ; for it rests with you to determine what the coming generation shall be in their re-

gards to Christianity. The relation in which you stand to them, as it gives you possession of their opening minds, and furnishes you with so many opportunities of instructing them, and implies the happiest union of that affection and authority by which your instructions may be enforced, and affords you the best means, not only of guiding them in the path of knowledge, but almost of dictating the maxims and principles they are to adopt, and of regulating and controlling the exercise of all their active powers—puts the formation of their character entirely into your hands, and burdens you in a great measure with the responsibility of their future treatment of the gospel.

It may happen, indeed, that the labors you bestow upon your offspring, shall often be counteracted, and sometimes nullified, by circumstances which you either could not anticipate, or against which you could not have provided, though you had foreseen them. This is what might be expected from the nature and situation of man; and it is what we see actually realized in the experience of the world. But these are only exceptions to the general law that we have stated. And it still remains equally certain and important as a general law, that if unbelief shall continue to prevail, or if its prevalence shall become stronger and more extensive, it will be owing, in no small degree, to your culpable neglect, or your injudicious management of the children whom God has given you, and that all the hopes we can rationally entertain of our posterity being emancipated from the bondage of unbelief, and brought under the dominion of the gospel, are founded on the

diligent and conscientious fulfilment of parental obligation.

To you who are parents, therefore, I would give the pre-eminence in the particular application of my subject. And I would beseech you to allow the impression to dwell upon your minds, that you must stand foremost in the ranks of opposition to the power of infidelity—that if you do your duty with becoming zeal and perseverance, the victory will speedily be gained—that if you desert your post, or act with languor and indecision, in vain will be the prowess, the toils, and the constancy, of all with whom you should have been associated in the holy contest. Do not fix your eye, as you are so apt to do, on those individual cases that have come under your observation, in which parental fidelity has failed to produce the intended effect; and do not quote those cases to justify yourselves, or to excuse yourselves for parental carelessness. This would argue no more wisdom in your mode of judging, than you would recognize in that of the husbandman who should resolve not to sow his fields any more, because once or twice in his lifetime the seed had not sprung up, or the harvest had been scanty. There is a providence that governs the operations and phenomena of the human mind, as well as a providence that extends its care over the soil and the seasons. And you are bound to conform yourselves to the lessons which it reads to you; and one of the most important of them is, that if you “train up your children in the way they should go, when they are old they will not depart from it.” This lesson, addressed to you in the course of providence, and inculcated

upon you by the word of God, it becomes you to reduce to practice. In proportion as your endeavors are skilful and vigorous, conformity to it must in general be attended with decided success. At any rate, it is strictly incumbent on you to perform the duty, and leave the consequences to God. And if you will attend to those instances in which you either suppose or know that a parent's best exertions have been fruitless and unavailing, attend to them only that you may discover the causes which have interfered to prevent the ordinary result, and that by removing or avoiding these, if possible, in your own case, your work may be more efficient and more productive.

You may think, perhaps, that your children are too young to be infected with infidelity, and that you need not therefore give yourselves much anxiety about them on that point, or be at any great pains to guard them against the evil. But you are mistaken. That your children will not become infidels in the common acceptation of that word, so long as they continue children, may be very true. But do not you expect them to grow up to manhood? Should not you even now train them up as carefully as you can, for its duties and its trials? And if infidelity is one, and the greatest, of those moral calamities to which they may be afterwards exposed, are not you bound to treat them in such a manner as that they shall have the best chance of escaping it? This is all that we inculcate; but it is a great deal. And we cannot be too earnest in exhorting you, and you cannot be too assiduous in your endeavors, to avoid every thing by which your children may at length be-

come an easy and unresisting prey to the seductions of an unbelieving world, and to do every thing by which they may be possessed of that information, those principles, and those habits, which shall fortify them against the temptations to irreligion and infidelity, that they must unavoidably meet with in the more advanced periods of life.

Of your affection for your children, we entertain no doubt. Nature has implanted it in your hearts; and a thousand various considerations are ever constraining you to exercise and to show it. We do not therefore call upon you to be affectionate to those to whom it is scarcely possible for you to be otherwise; but we call upon you to give the sentiment its proper direction—to cherish it under the most enlightened views—to guide its operations in such a way as to promote the highest interests of those whom you so tenderly love. And I would just ask you, my friends, what interests these are? The interests of their bodies, or the interests of their souls? Their interests as to earth, or their interests as to heaven? Their interests in time, or their interests throughout eternity? As professing Christians, or as having any idea and any feeling of religion left in you, it is impossible that you should hesitate about your answer to this question. You must acknowledge, that if your children live and die with the “evil heart of unbelief,” they are miserable, in the worst sense of that word; and if they live and die in the faith of the gospel, their happiness is great beyond expression, and secure beyond disappointment. Surely, then, the best proof of your parental affection is to be found in the anxious and un-

remitting care with which you strive to make them sincere, and practical, and firm believers in Christianity; a care, by means of which you not only advance their own personal welfare, but contribute, through their instrumentality, to the welfare of every coming generation. This is the plain statement of the case—the truth of which no sophistry can disguise or pervert, and to which the conscience of every one of you must bear witness. Let us now see what is to be made of its application.

To all the advantages of secular tuition, you are careful that your children shall be no strangers. It is your settled purpose, and your early endeavor, to have them initiated into human science, and adorned with elegant accomplishments; and, whether by the more substantial or the more showy, the more common or the more refined culture of their faculties, to fit them for the various occupations of a busy, a literary, or a fashionable life. And, for attaining this end, you grudge no expense upon them—you withhold no counsel from them—you take a lively interest in all the successive steps of their progress—you applaud them when they are diligent—you remonstrate with them when they are idle—and, by every expression of your feelings, you intimate to them how much emphasis you lay on their being properly qualified to make a figure in the world. Well; they at length go into the world, and in the profession which they have chosen, or in the sphere in which they move, you see that your plan of education has succeeded, and that they arrive at that eminence in the sight of men for which you had destined them, and

for which you had been so sedulous in preparing them; and you lay down your head, and sleep in peace, because those who are so dear to your souls, and for whom you have made so many sacrifices, and upon whom you have expended so many anxious thoughts, and lavished so many proofs of tenderness, are now prospering in the mercantile world, or shining to admiration in the gay world.

But what has become of religion all this while? How far has it been acknowledged in the education of your children? What degree of anxiety have you felt—what measure of diligence have you employed, in making them “wise unto salvation?” What sort of scholarship, or what sort of training, have you given them for the eternity of their existence? In what manner have you provided them against unbelief—against the temptations that lead to it—against the guilt that accompanies it—against the miseries that result from it? Has this been the subject of any concern with you at all? Or, having engaged in the task, have you devoted yourselves to the execution of it, with that attention, and industry, and watchfulness, which its importance and its difficulty required? This is an interesting and solemn inquiry, and leads to the most momentous consequences.

If in training your children you have neglected religion;—if you have not made it a regular and essential part of the system of instruction to which you have subjected them;—if you have allowed them to grow up in ignorance of him who made, and of him who redeemed them;—if you have dealt with them as if they had no souls to be sa-

ved, and no immortality to hope for, and no preparation to make for it;—if your conduct towards them has impressed it upon their minds, that if all be well with them in this life, there is nothing else that they need to care for—what can the issue of all this be, but unqualified infidelity? You send them abroad into the world without that knowledge, and without those principles which might have protected them from its allurements, and thus give them up, inconsiderate and defenceless, to the seductions of unbelieving men, and leave them to fall with headlong violence, or with unsuspecting simplicity, into those vicious practices which seldom fail to generate and to nourish a hardened opposition to every thing that wears the aspect of Christianity. Had you been studious to make them acquainted with the great truths and precepts of the gospel—to foster in their susceptible minds, feelings of respect for its authority and its usefulness—and to warn them of the dangers to which the abandonment of it would certainly expose them—had you done this, there might have been “good hope of them through grace,” even though they should have swerved from the commandments of God, and entered on a course of dissipation and licentiousness, and practically relinquished the faith they had been taught. A providential occurrence, or a friendly reproof, or a painful disappointment, might have stopped them in their wayward career, and led them to serious reflection; and then there might have rushed into their minds such a vivid recollection of all that they had once been told, and of all that they had once believed, and of all that they had once felt,

in relation to the things belonging to their peace, as by the divine blessing to recal them from their wanderings, and bring them back to their Saviour and their God. But, alas! if they have not been instructed, their situation is next to that of perfect hopelessness. They are not so likely to be touched with compunction; and even though they be, there are no latent resources that can be called forth—no good impression that can be revived—no materials upon which the Spirit may operate—no light to show them the path by which they might return; and unless they submit, in the maturity of age, to be tutored like children, and enjoy opportunities of being enlightened that are rarely afforded in such circumstances, they must, “for lack of knowledge,” perish in the infidelity into which they have sunk through the inattention and negligence of their parents. And how many they may have drawn along with them into this perdition, it may well alarm you to conjecture; and how much you are involved in this aggravation of their guilt and ruin, it will be for you to account on that day when they and you shall stand together “before the judgement-seat of Christ.”

But the case is still worse, when your children have received from you, by direct conveyance, the elements of infidelity—when there is not merely that total neglect of their religious education which naturally leads to it, but an actual imbuing of their minds with its maxims, and an actual predisposing of their habits for its dominion. This happens when they hear you speaking lightly of religion, or see you treating it with contempt—when they observe you neglecting its ordinances, and viola-

ting its precepts, as if in neither department it had any authority—when you inculcate upon them views of duty and motives of action, which have no reference to the gospel, or which are in direct opposition to it—when for their entertainment and for that of your guests, you pour forth your profane and unsparing ridicule on its vital doctrines, and on all who preach and on all who love them—when in their presence you give ungodly counsel, or walk in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of the scorner—when Christianity is systematically excluded from your plan of life, and when, from your conversation and your conduct, they are obliged to conclude, that so far from enjoying any portion of your respect, it is the object of your contempt or hatred, your indifference or disbelief.

In these circumstances, you do not so much prepare them for becoming infidels, as you send them away from you with the character already formed. You have introduced them into the path in which destroyers go, and in which they who walk, are themselves destroyed. You have prejudiced and you have hardened them against every thing that can be advanced in favor of the gospel. You have taught them to open their mouths against the heavens, and to blaspheme the name, and defy the authority of Him, without reverence for whom all religion is vain, and all faith in it a mere pretence. You have inspired them with the inclination, you have furnished them with the means, you have set them the example of leading others astray. You have sent them upon the scene of human life to fill up the measure of their own demerit, and to spread around them, wherever they

go, that rank and deadly contagion with which you had so wantonly polluted them under the sanction of paternal love. And though it is probable that the same carelessness, or the same aversion to religion which made your domestic circle the school of infidelity, may prevent you from seeing any thing in their future conduct and fate that is calculated to excite compunction or regret, it may nevertheless come to pass, that those on whom you flattered yourselves you had ever looked with fond affection, shall be as much ruined by you as if it had been your determined purpose to ruin them—that they shall go down to the grave amidst the horrors of a despondency, created by that unbelief which they learned from you, or in a profound insensibility to what lies before them, which originates in the same source, and is a still more fatal and distressing symptom of perdition—and that after their departure to their own place, they shall have left behind them, in the wickedness and the misery of those whom they had prevailed upon to forsake the ways of wisdom, many a heart-rending proof of the guilt that is accumulated on your head for corrupting the principles of those whom it was your first duty, and should have been your fondest delight, to “bring up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

But, my friends, laying these aggravated cases out of view, and supposing you to have such a regard for Christianity, and such a sense of parental obligation, as that you fail not to impart religious education to your children, a great deal depends on the mode and degree in which you do this, in

order to its being a preservative against infidelity. It is very possible for you to give religion such a subordinate place in your system of tuition, or to manage the communication of its truths with so little judgement, or to have so much inconsistency in the whole transaction, as shall frustrate all your best intentions, and all your most zealous efforts. And, therefore, to this point I would request your attention for a little.

Let me beg you to remember, in the *first* place, that true religion is either every thing, or it is nothing. There is no other object with which it can divide the homage and submission of mankind. And the moment that you allow any other object to take the precedence, that moment do you allow that the wisdom, and the will, and the authority of the Most High God, may be disregarded with impunity and with innocence; and thus a foundation is laid, upon which unbelief to any extent may be built. When, therefore, you propose religion to your children as a thing not of paramount importance, as well as unquestionable verity, but only so important and so true as to deserve a large portion of regard—when it forms a part of the instruction which you give them, but is just permitted to take its place on the same level with secular studies—when it is treated with so little ceremony, that if there be a competition for preference among the various tasks in which they are engaged, its lessons are readily and invariably postponed to every other—when it is seldom or never spoken of, except on a Sunday, when you do not think it right to speak to them on any thing else,

and when it is thus packed into a single corner of their time, while for all other topics, and for all other occupations, there is almost unlimited scope—and when, instead of being made to run through the whole range of their employment, and to take the pre-eminence over every other consideration that comes before them, and to pervade, by its governing and sanctifying influence, all that they say and do, it is kept by itself, and treated as a scheme of inferior or of doubtful moment, which must be taken up seldom, and which may be laid aside on any pretence whatever—when this is the case, I appeal to you, if you can reasonably look for any thing like the growth of a firm and cordial faith in the minds of your children, or if you may not rather expect to see them drudging on with their Christian exercises as long as you make a point of it, but abandoning them altogether as soon as they are left to the freedom of their own will, and practising on a larger scale, the lesson which you have taught them on a smaller scale, by renouncing as a thing of *no* consequence what they had been accustomed to see treated as a thing of *little* consequence. It is indispensably necessary, for guarding against this event, that in communicating a knowledge of Christianity to your children, you be careful to press upon them its infinite moment, and give it a prominence far beyond all the other branches of education put together. This is nothing more than what is due to its divine origin and its intrinsic merits, and it is indispensably requisite for overcoming that repugnance which they naturally feel to its restraints, for establishing their belief in it as a dispensation of practical

and experimental truth, and for preserving their attachment to it amidst the temptations of their youthful years, and amidst the cares and trials, the prosperities and adversities, of their mature age.

Let me beg you to remember, in the *second* place, that to store the memories of your children with the doctrines of religion, and even to secure the assent of their understanding to the truth of all these, is not by any means sufficient to provide against their degenerating into unbelief. In this case, religion has comparatively a feeble hold of them; and whenever there comes to be a struggle between their corrupt passions and their intellectual views, it is not difficult to perceive that victory must speedily declare for the former, and that their conquest will be as permanent as it is decisive. You must study, therefore, to engage the *hearts* of your children in favor of religion. You must strive to make them in love with it, and to make them love it so ardently that they will be unwilling to disobey it, and still more unwilling to forsake it. You must endeavor to lead them under subjection to its power; to bring home its comforts to them; to animate them with its hopes; to give them a real and habitual feeling of its value in all the varied circumstances of life; and to inspire them with a relish for its peculiar pleasures, and exercises, and duties. You must contrive to find a place for it in all the different affections of their nature, and to interweave it so closely and intimately with every one of these, that no ordinary temptations shall be able to break the union. And thus, whenever infidelity assails

them, whether it addresses itself to their hopes or their fears, their ambition or their self-love, their experience of what it would tear from them, will in these, and in every other respect, present a ready and a powerful resistance, and keep them steadfast in a faith which is associated with all that it is interesting to know, and with all that it is delightful to feel.

Let me beg you to remember, in the *third* place, that all the religious instructions which you convey to your children must be associated with a corresponding practice. They must be very much influenced in their regards towards Christianity, by the judgement which you form and express concerning it. If they are fully convinced that it is the object of your faith, this consideration alone will have a strong tendency to make it the object of theirs. But if they discover or suspect that, notwithstanding your professions, you really do not believe in it, neither will they believe in it; and in defiance of all that you may say to the contrary, they will justify themselves for not believing in it, by respect for your superior knowledge and more matured understanding. Now, they cannot suppose you to be believers, when they observe you deliberately contradicting, by your conduct, so many of the lessons which you inculcate upon them as enforced by divine authority. They cannot suppose you, for instance, to believe in the divinity of a system which says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," when they see you profaning it by business, amusement, and conviviality. They cannot suppose you to believe in the divinity of a system which says, "Thou shalt

not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," when they hear you blaspheming that name every day of the week, and every hour of the day. They cannot suppose you to believe in the divinity of a system which says, "Pray without ceasing," when you give them reason to conclude, that prayer is a stranger equally to your lips and to your heart. They cannot suppose you to believe in the divinity of a system which says, "Be not conformed to the world," when the world engrosses so much of your regard, that it often comes between you and your sacred duties, and makes you live like men who are its acknowledged devotees. And so of a thousand other cases. When your children observe these things, it is their *natural* inference, though an erroneous one, that the system cannot be divine, which you treat with such marked irreverence; and while they may learn what you prescribe to them, and do what you require of them, from respect for your authority, or from fear of your displeasure, yet they can have no faith in Christianity as a dispensation from God. It gradually loses any hold it may once have had of their minds. And as soon as they are at liberty to act according to their own pleasure, they follow your example, and cast your admonitions behind their backs.—If, therefore, you would train them up so as effectually to guard them against the inroads or domination of infidelity, you must add to your religious instructions, such a character as will stamp the impression of sincerity on all the anxiety that you profess, and on all the admonitions that you give, and in this way combine together all the weight of parental conviction, and all the advanta-

ges of parental teaching, and all the influence of parental piety and virtue, and make them bear with united energy on the principles of your children, so as to keep them from the "evil heart of unbelief," and prevent their departure "from the living God."

II. I am now, in the *second* place, to apply the subject, by addressing myself to young men.

Such of you as are already irreligious, will not easily be persuaded to desist from the course you are pursuing. Impelled by corrupt passion, or governed by evil habits, and supposing, as probably you have brought yourselves to do, that the strength of the argument is all on your side, I cannot have much hope that you will listen to any entreaties and remonstrances of mine. And yet I may just ask you, if you have ever seriously considered the subject,—if you have given it the attention which its importance demands,—and if your infidelity be the result of sober and mature reflection, of such reasoning as your understanding ought to be satisfied with in such a case, of an enlightened regard to what is most suitable to your character as rational beings, and best calculated to promote your highest and most permanent interests? I would request you to pause for a little in your career, and with earnestness and solemnity to put the question to yourselves, whether you be indeed convinced that Christianity is such a fable as you have contrived to think it—whether you be not following your inclinations rather than your judgement—whether you be prepared in deliberate anticipation and

with unfaltering fortitude, to abide the final result, whatever it may be, of your ungodliness and unbelief? And I would affectionately beseech you to remember that no time is to be lost—that if you persevere in thoughtlessness, in profane practices, and immoral indulgences, you will soon become confirmed in your opposition to religion, and incapable of any thing like an unbiased consideration of its merits—and that though now in the very morning of your days, and dreaming of nothing but a lengthened life for study or for pleasure, as you may chance to use it, yet before another year, or another month, or another week shall have elapsed, you may be numbered with the dead, and ushered into the very midst of all those great realities which you now treat as fiction or superstition, and find, when the discovery, alas! shall be too late, that there is a God whom you have forgotten, and a Saviour whom you have despised—a heaven into which you can never enter, and a hell from which you never can escape.

But I am to speak chiefly to those young men who have been educated in the faith of the gospel, and who have hitherto been preserved from the contagion of infidelity. And to you I would offer the following counsels.

Let me counsel you to bear in mind the intimate and inseparable connexion that there is between moral conduct and religious faith. Your religious faith is still secure, and you have placed it on such grounds, and you possess it in such vigour and confidence, that you have no apprehension of its decaying. But “let him that think-

eth he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Your passions are strong and impetuous—the world is attractive to your gay and inexperienced minds—its pleasures are continually inviting you to partake—and you have all the encouragement that can be afforded by fashion and example. Be therefore perpetually on your guard, that by preserving yourselves free from the pollutions of vice, you may also "keep your confidence steadfast unto the end." Do not harbor the delusive idea for a moment, that though you lose your virtue you may retain your faith, and that though you go on to indulge in sin, your good principles may still continue to exist, and may revive again in their pristine strength at some future and more convenient season. One of the most common avenues by which infidelity enters the heart, is that of immorality, and not to dwell on the obvious truth, that the belief which does not ensure obedience to the law of God, is dead and useless, you should recollect that there is nothing which tends so much to bias the mind against Christianity as wicked habits; and that even though you should afterwards be made sensible of the necessity of returning to the living God, from whom you had thus departed, you may find that the dominion of sin is too firmly established to be overturned, and that as you had lost your relish for the purity of the gospel, so you had proportionally impaired your conviction of its truth, and your attachment to its doctrines. Be exhorted, therefore, to walk with undeviating strictness in the path of righteousness. Your progress in this path will not only be a means of fortifying you against the inroads

of unbelief, but it will help to strengthen and animate your confidence in the Redeemer, and to bind you more and more every day to that religion of whose sanctifying power you have thus the continual witness in your own heart and in your own character. It will enable you to judge more clearly and more candidly of all its evidences. It will give you deeper impressions of its excellence and value. And thus, by the blessing of God, you shall be more effectually preserved from the "evil heart of unbelief."

Be cautious as to the books that you peruse. With respect to those books whose professed object is to decry Christianity, and to make you reject it, it may be justly questioned whether you should read them at all. If your faith is settled on grounds which you conceive and feel to be satisfactory, then to bring often before your view that which represents it as the effect of credulity or superstition, is only to run the risk of perplexing yourselves with doubts and difficulties which may be started in reference to any subject, and of enfeebling your conviction, which may be done by the mere repetition of an argument which in itself is utterly futile and inapplicable. But there are books of general instruction, and books of an entertaining kind, which are tinged with the principles of infidelity, and in which these are so interwoven with truths that you must receive, and with narratives, and descriptions, and characters, which interest and delight you, that you can hardly avoid imbibing the deadly poison along with the wholesome food. Such books you will sometimes meet with in ranging over the field of literature.

And I need scarcely tell you, that they are far more dangerous than the other. The other class of books forewarn you of what you may expect to find in them; and you either lay them aside, or you read them with the resolution to oppose their statements and their lessons at every page, or at every sentence. But this class of books are presented to you under the guise of useful learning, or of innocent amusement; and, before you are aware, infidelity is infused into your understanding, or into your heart. You learn maxims, you acquire associations, you receive impressions as to matters of fact, which are inconsistent with Christian faith, and which are not the less influential and pernicious, that they have stolen in upon your mind without your being conscious of their bearings on the subject of religion. Now, my young friends, the great rule to be observed here, is to go to the perusal of every book that you do peruse, under the government of religious principle, and with a thorough knowledge of revelation. If religious principle reigns in your mind as it ought to do, with unrivalled sway, you will be jealous of every statement, and of every insinuation that seems to dispute or to question its authority; and if you are as well acquainted with scriptural truth as you ought to be, you will be able to detect every thing as it occurs, which contradicts the divine testimony, or which would bring suspicion on the divine record. And thus being prepared to separate the chaff from the wheat, you may not only prosecute your studies with safety, but derive edification from that which might otherwise have perverted, and misled, and

ruined you. It is highly becoming that you should increase your information, and improve your intellect; but this must not be done at the expense of that which should be dearer to you than all the secular erudition of the world. Nor is it necessary that such a sacrifice should be made. Only be careful to exercise caution and vigilance; fortify your judgement with the decided and ever-present conviction of the truth and importance of Christianity; let your memory be amply furnished with its details; let your feelings be pervaded by the love of all that it holds out to purify and to comfort you; and then there is no production of human genius, whether it be requisite for the improvement, or useful for the recreation of your mind, which it will be dangerous for you to peruse. For supposing it to contain what is unfriendly to religion, you will either reject it altogether as unpalatable and disgusting, or you will peruse it when it promises to be substantially and generally useful, with such a discriminating perception of its excellencies and defects, and such a holy jealousy of every encroachment it may make on the sacred page of inspiration, as at once to advance you in the path of knowledge, and to deliver you from the snares with which that path is so often encompassed.

It is necessary that you be very careful of the ideas which you attach to philosophy and religion, considered in relation to each other. There is something which a certain set of men call philosophy; and though they have not thought proper to give us any accurate definition, or any minute description of it, they have contrived to speak of

it, as if it were well and universally understood, and as if all its maxims, and positions, and conclusions, were equally indisputable and important: And then they find out by this infallible standard that religion is fabulous and absurd, and in this very easy and convenient way, they set religion and philosophy in opposition to each other. Now let me counsel you to be on your guard against this abuse of terms. The philosophy of infidels is any thing they choose to make it, and must therefore be frequently in opposition to religion; but *true* philosophy is a very different thing; and the more it is cultivated, the more does it tend to show us that religion is full of wisdom, without any admixture of error or of folly. Christianity addresses itself to the understanding of men as a system capable of proof, and as a system actually proved. And if it be proved to have come from heaven, what sort of philosophy must that be which contradicts the only wise God! There are many branches of general philosophy with which Christianity does not particularly intermeddle, though it gives an additional charm and value to them all, by connecting every subject of human contemplation with the Almighty and beneficent Parent of the universe. But it is a fact worthy of your attention, that the farther that scientific men have gone with their researches into the facts and history of natural science, the more nearly have their discoveries approached to what the sacred volume tells us of the material world, and of its inhabitants. And then, what system of philosophy has ever given such a satisfactory explanation of the phenomena which the moral world presents to our

view, or enlightened us so much respecting the character of God, and the condition and duties of of man, or proposed such an efficient scheme for his purification and his comfort, or disclosed such glorious prospects for him in a future state, or altogether afforded such a consistent, and honorable, and consolatory view of the Divine government? This, my young friends, is the true philosophy, and this is peculiar to Christianity; and if Christianity were abolished, agreeably to the wishes of the philosophers, falsely so called, all this would again give place to doubt, and darkness, and guilt, and despair; and it is in this that you and we shall rejoice for ever, when the vain idols of an infidel philosophy shall have tumbled into ruins, and when they that made them, and that worshipped them, shall perish along with them. And if ever you are taunted with the weakness of preferring the gospel to philosophy, remember, for your comfort and your encouragement, that the gospel has found some of its ablest advocates in the most enlightened of philosophers, and that it can never be an imputation on your understanding to believe in that which engaged the patient inquiry, and commanded the steady belief of a Locke, a Newton, and a Boyle.

One word more, and I have done. One of the most formidable weapons that will be employed to seduce you into unbelief is ridicule. It has always been a formidable weapon in this warfare; and if sophistry has slain its thousands, ridicule has slain its tens of thousands. It is particularly trying to young minds. With them it is most successful. And therefore with them it is most

frequently employed. And if it is that which "scarce the firm philosopher can scorn," how will *you* be able to set it at defiance, and in spite of it to confess Christ before men? Pray that you may be delivered from the evil of this temptation. And study to contrast the vanity of those who would thus make you unbelievers, with the infinite importance of that from which they labor to detach your faith. What is there in the derision of the wisest and wittiest of them, which should make you ashamed of the gospel of Christ? Can their derision send the soul of man to perish with the clay which it animates—or break down the tribunal which is erected for the judgement of the world—or annihilate one attribute of Him who sitteth upon the throne? Can you allow their unhallowed jesting to conquer all the reasons which your understanding has approved, and which your heart has sanctioned, for believing in the great realities of revelation? And if they shall unfortunately prevail, where will be the proud scorn of the philosopher, and where will be the souls of its infatuated victims, on the great day of reckoning and retribution? What will they who uttered it plead in *your* behalf, or in their own? And, O how shall you be able to stand when charged with the guilt of braving the frown of Omnipotence, and renouncing the love of your Redeemer, and spurning away from you all the glories of an offered salvation, that you might escape the laughter of the fool, which is but for a moment? Let me conjure you, my young friends, to assume the courage which it becomes you, as good soldiers of Christ, to feel and to display. Let "none of

these things move you." Stand fast in the faith of Jesus; and let the world scowl or let it laugh as it may. And if at any time you feel as if it were about to overpower you, just set the book of inspiration and the book of infidelity before you, and say, which of them you will choose for your comforter and your guide:—And just think of the grave in which you must soon lie down, and say, whether would you be laid in it, in despondency as to all that lies beyond it, or in the hope of a glorious resurrection:—And just think of the judgement that will come after death, and say, whether you would have the sentence, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom which is prepared for you from the foundation of the world,—or that other sentence, "Depart ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels?"

SERMON IX.

SAME TEXT.

III. I would now address myself to those who occupy the higher stations of society.

And you I would caution against infidelity for your own sake. It is just as sinful and as ruinous in your case, as it is in that of the obscurest and meanest of the people. Christianity was promulgated as a plan of salvation for you as well as for them. Its benefits are promised to none but those who believe. Its threatenings are denounced against all, without respect of persons, who do not believe. And if you have rejected it, I am not entitled to say, that there is any thing else for the greatest and the proudest of you, than "a certain fearful looking for of wrath and fiery indignation, that will devour you as the adversaries" of God. There are differences of human condition; and if among these it has fallen to your lot to be elevated above others, that gives you certain advantages which are denied to them, and certain claims which they are not entitled to prefer; but it is

none of the advantages of your condition, and none of the claims arising out of it, that you should be exempted from the obligation which lies upon all to whom the gospel is offered, to receive it and to submit to it. To you as sinners it is offered; and your refusal to accept of it is the seal of your guilt, and the token of your perdition. So long as you are in the land of living men, you may wrap yourselves up in the robes of adventitious dignity, and make the distinctions which God permits for the benefit of the social state, an occasion of exalting yourselves against his will, and go on to despise his message, as if this were one of the privileges by which you are distinguished from the multitude; but know that, in the sight of Him who rules among the inhabitants of the earth, as well as over the hosts of heaven, you are lower than the lowest of our race who fears his God and loves his Saviour. And know also that the period is approaching, when your worldly greatness shall be humbled to the dust—when death shall strip you of all the external endowments, and of all the high consideration with which you are now invested—and when thus denuded and defenceless, you shall stand before the tribunal of that Judge in whose eye the rich and the poor, the great and the small, are upon one common level, and be doomed to that “everlasting destruction with which all those shall be punished who know not God and obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

But I am to address you chiefly for the sake of others—as those whose conduct affects society at large. Your influence in forming the opinions

and regulating the practice of those who move in the lower walks of life, is universally acknowledged. And this influence is of such constant and powerful operation, that the character of the one class is uniformly a very correct index to the character of the other. Your rank, your opulence, your education, your power—these and their kindred properties cast an air of splendor and superiority around you, which causes you to be looked up to with a steady and respectful eye. Feelings of reverence and admiration being thus associated with every view that can be taken of your condition, the principle of imitation operates of course; and, as far as it can be practised, a conformity to what you are, and to what you do, will be studied and attained. In general, the effect is insensibly produced. Those upon whom it takes place are not always aware of its cause. And even at the very time, perhaps, that they are expressing displeasure and hatred against you, they are surrendering themselves unconsciously to your guidance, in the most important parts of human conduct. Frequently, however, they know and feel that you are the model which they follow. They intentionally set it before them for their direction. And they confidently appeal to it in every disputed case, as a proof that their behavior is right and justifiable. At any rate, it is a fact ascertained by invariable experience, and agreeable to the reason and nature of the thing, that the influence which you possess over them is of such potent and perpetual operation, that from the aspect which they present to us, we can know

precisely the example which you have been setting before them.

Were their character such as it ought to be, and such as you would wish it to be, I have no doubt you would readily admit the fact that I have stated, and take credit to yourselves for the good that you had thus been instrumental in accomplishing. But if their character be of an opposite description, your admission of the fact will be attended with more difficulty, and you will be anxious either to deny it altogether, or to receive it with such qualifications as may exonerate you from the charge of misleading and corrupting them. But it is impossible either to deny or to qualify the fact. It is a fact which our acquaintance with the nature and circumstances of man would have led us to anticipate beforehand. It is a fact to which the history of every country and of every stage of society bears the most unequivocal attestations. It is a fact which has always been acknowledged as both obvious and important. And it is a fact which must not be questioned, till you can produce an instance in which the people at large have been profligate in principle and practice, while piety and virtue have been flourishing among the higher ranks; or an instance in which the higher ranks were irreligious and immoral, and yet the people at large were living strictly in the fear of God, and in the obedience of his commandments. You can produce no such instance. Nor is it possible for such an instance to take place, till human nature and human society be differently constituted from what they are.

The conclusion, then, that we are necessitated to draw, is this ; that if impiety, and vice, and insubordination, prevail among the inferior classes of the community, the guilt of this does not rest with them. They indeed are guilty, and they are accountable ; and if they repent not, they shall not escape the wrath of God. But you are partakers of the guilt : to you it may in a great measure be ultimately traced : you have not employed the means with which Providence has furnished you for preventing it : you have occasioned it by indulging in a course of life, and holding forth an example which you should have known were to produce and encourage the evils to which we have alluded, and which do exist to an extent that every good man must deplore. I do not say this for the purpose of dividing the blame between the upper and lower classes, or of showing that the former are as much implicated as the latter ; but for the purpose of leading your views to one great source of the disease, and thus pointing out the remedy by which it may be effectually cured. And, my friends, you must do me the justice to believe that in what I have already said, or in what I am still further to say on this subject, I mean no particular application to you, as if you were above all others involved in the argument. I am not accustomed to flatter you—but neither would I choose to single you out for censure. I must be understood as addressing the higher ranks in general ; and, alas ! those of them who need the discussion most seldom bring themselves within the reach of the ministry of God's word. But our observations may, perhaps, go home to the consciences of some

of you now hearing me ; and they may not be unprofitable to any of you.

On the grounds, then, already stated, we lay it down as an undeniable proposition, that the varied corruption which so lamentably prevails among the lower ranks of our population, is owing in no slight degree to your example.

And, *first*, as to the irreligion that is to be found among them. You may allege that you esteem Christianity very much, and that you have always supported its establishment in the country, and that in all your intercourse with the people you never advised them to trample upon it, but urged upon them its excellence and necessity. True ; but what of all this, if you have at the same time afforded them substantial and satisfying evidence that you have no real faith in it, and no cordial regard for it, and that you were merely employing it as an engine to govern *them*, while for *yourselves* you would take the liberty to live according to your own pleasure ? Have you been given to profaning the name of God, and cursing men who are made after the similitude of God ? Have you been habitual despisers of those ordinances which the author of the gospel has instituted, and by which it is, in a great measure, that the very knowledge of religion is preserved and perpetuated in the world ? Have you been indulging yourselves freely in those acts of intemperance and impurity, for which things' sake the wrath of God is denounced against you as the children of disobedience ? Have you been running that incessant round of frivolous and fashionable amusements which is so destructive of all se-

rious thought, and so inconsistent with the high calling of the Christian? Have you been doing all this? And have the people seen you doing it? And are they so stupid, think you, as not to consider it in the light of a declaration, much more expressive than any verbal declaration can be, that religion is not the object of your belief, and that at the very best you regard it as but a political fable, necessary for the poor, but useless to the rich? Observe, now, this is the lesson which you have really taught them, and which you have taught them in the most emphatic manner. And is it wonderful that they should have learned it, and that they should practise it? It is too agreeable to their natural depravity not to be welcomed when inculcated by such teachers. It will be treasured up with the more avidity, when they see you making use of religion merely to keep them in a state of subjection and restraint. And besides, it is quite unreasonable to expect that they should retain it, when they see you disdainfully casting it away. It is unreasonable to expect this, so long as you claim the respect of those who are beneath you in worldly station, and make it one of your complaints against them that this respect is withheld. Do not you see that you are inconsistent in this? Their respect for you—their submission to your influence—their habitual and reverential looking up to you, is the very cause of that which you condemn. They feel such deference for your judgement, even when you are most anxious that they should not know its decisions, or that knowing they should disregard them, that they will not believe the gospel because you

do not believe it. So long as they had the idea that it was the object of *your* faith and attachment, it was also the object of *their* faith and attachment. But whenever they discover that you are hostile to it, they also become its enemy by becoming your ally, and serving you and following you in the cause of irreligion and infidelity.

It is, indeed, one pleasing and consolatory circumstance, that so many of the higher ranks seem to feel a sincere regard to religion, and that, while they make it a matter of personal concern, they also take a lively interest in its prosperity. This, I say, is a pleasing and consolatory circumstance ; and I trust that the instances of it will become more numerous and more decided every day. And you may be assured that its effects on the religious character of the people will be proportionally observable. But you must not be surprised, my friends, if a considerable time elapse before any thorough improvement is accomplished. It is much more difficult to bring men back to the right path, than to seduce them into the wrong one. They have acquired many evil habits which must be overcome. You have therefore a great work of reformation before you ; and to bring it to a successful issue, it behoves you to exert yourselves with ardent zeal, with united energy, and with unwearied perseverance. And if, besides your personal godliness, you make a conscientious use of that influence which you possess, in securing faithful and pains-taking pastors for the people, in providing more carefully for the religious education of their children, and in giving efficacy to the various means which already

subsist for advancing among them the interests of Christianity, we may look at no very distant period for such an improvement in their character as will be equally delightful to the Christian and to the patriot.

In the *next* place, as to the *immorality* that prevails among the people. You will probably allow that in many of its features it may be directly traced to the example of their superiors, because in numerous instances the vices in which they indulge are the same in both. But I am anxious that you should not rest contented with this limited deduction. I am anxious to impress you with the idea, that irreligion is the parent of immorality—that if religious principle exists, immoral example will generally be withstood—and that if religious principle be destroyed, then, independently of bad example, and in spite of good example, profligacy will be the general and final result. The prevalence of licentiousness and crime has infidelity as its primary and continually operating cause: and whether this infidelity has originated in your disregard to the Christian faith, or whether it has been generated by other means, one thing is certain, that those who have been seduced by it, were prepared for that apostasy by what they saw of your speculative or practical irreligion, and that they will in all probability continue in it so long as your influence is employed to give it countenance. And to expect good morals and virtuous actions, or any thing but wickedness and abomination, from those whose minds are enslaved by infidelity, is not less ab-

surd than to expect "grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles."

It has been affirmed, indeed, that we wrongfully impute the immoralities of the lower classes to the example of the higher: and the latter may say, "Do we set an example to the former of falsehood, and theft, and robbery?" Perhaps not; but that is not the question. If by your conduct you destroy in their minds the principles of religion which alone can make them holy, you may be said, with perfect propriety and justice, to teach them whatever practices natively flow from that destruction of their religious principles. You have your peculiar temptations, and they have theirs. And their modes of sinning will accordingly be on many occasions, and in many respects, different from yours. But if you have taken away from them that which disposed and enabled them to resist temptation, from whatever quarter it might come, and of whatever kind it might be, then surely it is no excuse to say that they have not seen you commit offences to which you had no allurements, but to which they had many. You have opened the floodgates; and the impetuous torrent takes its own course, and will desolate whatever comes within its reach; and of all its devastations you are the cause, though they have reached much farther, and extended much more widely, than you either wished or intended. If you spread infidelity, you spread immorality; and therefore, as you lament and deprecate the immorality which deforms the whole face and character of every community that it pervades, re-

turn to the faith of the gospel; give it all the sanction and all the patronage which your eminent stations are capable of affording; and labor to make the people unlearn the infidel lessons which they have read in your example, and infuse into them, and nourish in them, the belief of that doctrine which is the only spring of holiness, as it is the only fountain of consolation.

In the *last* place, so far as there is a revolutionary spirit among the people, that also is the fruit of irreligion and infidelity. A revolutionary spirit implies such a heartless disregard of every thing that is good, and orderly, and comfortable, in the social state—it leads to the perpetration of so many aggravated crimes—it produces so much misery to individuals and to families, to all of every rank and condition of life, that it cannot find a harbor in any mind which has not banished far from it the fear of God, the love of man, and the hopes of the gospel. And therefore you not only find it invariably connected with an impious contempt of the principles and precepts of Christianity, but you always see those who are laboring to diffuse it among the people, artfully preparing the way by doing every thing to engender and to cherish the “evil heart of unbelief.” In their way to the overthrow of social order and submission to lawful authority, they are sure, as a preliminary both necessary and effectual, to attempt the overthrow of the Bible as a divine record of faith and duty.

Now, though you who occupy the higher stations of life must be decidedly and irreconcilably hostile to the designs of revolutionary men, yet

you may not be innocent of lending *assistance* to their designs, and of doing that by which their success must be promoted and secured. And this is the case, so far as by your language or by your conduct you have given countenance to that irreligion which, independently of this, is so natural to the depraved heart, and which, implying a proud impatience under the restraints imposed by the authority of Heaven, gives birth to the same proud and restless impatience under all the restraints that are enacted by human authority, even when sanctioned by the maxims of revelation. There is no rational, nor effectual, nor possible way of eradicating revolutionary principles, and preventing a revolutionary crisis, but by sending abroad upon the public mind the salutary and correcting influences of true religion—by bringing men back from the remorseless maxims of infidelity, to the mild, and holy, and elevating system of the gospel—and by subjecting them to the faith and the dominion of him who brought with him the message of “peace on earth and good will to men,” who teaches at once to “fear God and to honor the king,” and who forms between the rulers and the governed that tie of kindness, of duty and affection, which removes all corruption and oppression on the one hand, and all groundless jealousies and wanton disobedience on the other, and unites them both in every purpose and in every measure, which has for its object the peace and the prosperity and the happiness of the commonwealth.

If, then, my friends, you would break down and annihilate the schemes of revolutionary men, you

must do it by the weapons which are only to be found in the armory of God. You must do it by the instrumentality of "pure and undefiled religion." Other means may be useful as auxiliaries; but this alone is mighty for the full and final accomplishment of your purpose. And remember that the "form of godliness" will not do. The assumption of that will only confirm the people in their infidelity, and provoke them to a more open impiety, and a more rancorous hostility. If they see you putting on religion merely as a cloak to hide your profaneness and your vices;—if they see you prostituting its sacred rites for the sake of office and of power;—if they see you employing it as a political machine to keep down the boisterous passions which you cannot otherwise restrain;—if they see you deliberately trampling on the obligations and duties of religion during all the season of public tranquillity, and then flying to it in times of anarchy and danger, merely from the impulse of terror;—or if they see you making it the mere pander of party politics, and associating all its truth and all its importance with interested views of civil government, and with the miserable shiftings of human opinion—if they see this, what effect can it have but to degrade Christianity still more in their esteem, and to ripen them still more speedily for deeds of rapine and of blood? You must become truly religious. You must put your hearts under the sway of the Lord Jesus Christ. You must prove the sincerity of your faith by the holiness of your conduct. You must be "righteous before God" and before men, "walking in all the com-

mandments and in all the ordinances of the Lord blameless." And thus uniting the power and the attractions of personal religion, with the commanding influence which you derive from the exalted stations to which Providence has raised you, what blessings might we not expect to the rich, and to the poor, to our country, and to the world!

IV. I now address myself to those who fill the inferior stations of society.

Do not suppose, my friends, though the classes that are above you in station contract a very aggravated guilt in consequence of setting a wicked example before you, that you are therefore blameless when you imitate that example. This is a conclusion which you are extremely apt to draw, and in which you too often take refuge, to save yourselves from the reproaches of your own conscience, and to excuse the vices and the follies in which you are naturally disposed to indulge. But remember that you have the knowledge of what is wrong,—that you have the power of resisting the temptations to commit it, which may be presented to you,—and that you are accountable to your Maker for every thing that you do with a willing mind. Whatever alleviation it may be of your sin, that you have been in some measure misled by those who should have employed their influence to keep you in the faith and obedience of Christ, and in whatever degree it may increase their condemnation, that either with intention or by carelessness, they have contributed to your apostasy, it is impossible that any such cir-

circumstances can exculpate you from the charge of rebelling against the God of heaven and earth, or shield you from that "wrath which cometh upon all the children of disobedience." If you know what is evil, and do it, and if you know what is good, and do it not, "to you it is sin." And your sin is the greater, and your punishment will be the more certain, because belief and infidelity, the path of righteousness and the path of unrighteousness, the happy termination of the one, and the miserable termination of the other, were distinctly set before you; because if there were allurements drawing you aside, there were also motives that should have determined you to go straight onward; because, if the scene of lawless indulgence on which you have entered, was pictured out to you in gay and fascinating colors, you had also been often and affectionately warned against the dangers which these concealed; and because, notwithstanding all this, you have "chosen darkness rather than light," and preferred the guidance of corrupt and fallible men, to the lessons and the commandments of the living God.

But while I say this, in reference to any plea you may derive from the example of your superiors in station, I must also take notice of another source of infidelity, against which it may be necessary to put you upon your guard. There are men in the world who, in their conversation or in their writings, would persuade you that Christianity is your foe, and that it is your interest to disbelieve it, because it sanctions those distinctions in outward condition, and those institutions of civil government, which serve to keep you, as

they term it, in a state of depression and bondage. And as this is an argument for infidelity which is not only employed, but which is likely enough to be often listened to with patience and with pleasure, I beg your attention to the following remarks.

Consider, my friends, in the *first* place, that when Christianity sanctions the distinctions of outward condition and the institutions of civil government, it only sanctions what arises out of the natural frame of society, and what universal experience shows to be both necessary and useful. It requires nothing more than what you yourselves have observed, to convince you, that to put an end to outward distinctions, and to regular government, would not only be productive of vast mischief to the community at large, but is utterly impracticable, so long as man continues to be constituted as he is, and so long as he inhabits such a system of things as that in which his Creator has actually placed him. Had Christianity attempted to overturn these, or had it proceeded on the supposition that they did not exist, this would have manifested such ignorance in its author, as to prove that it had not come from God. That very feature of it which consists in its recognition of the great fundamental principles and unalterable facts, which are either essential to the existence, or conducive to the prosperity of the social state, instead of furnishing an objection to it, is one of the many evidences which demonstrate it to be a revelation from Him who formed and who governs us, and consequently to be worthy of our unlimited submission.

But you will observe, in the *second* place, that Christianity evinces its divine origin, by going a step farther, and inculcating those maxims which tend to regulate the conduct of every class, and in this way to promote the welfare and happiness of all. It does not dictate to the poor, and leave the rich to their own guidance. It does not enjoin submission on subjects, and permit their rulers to exercise the power entrusted to them as they may think proper. Look into its pages, and you will find it having no such respect of persons as some of its insidious enemies would have you to believe. You will find it most impartial in its dealings with the consciences, and the characters, and the interests of mankind. You will find it laying its authoritative injunctions on all of every description, and in every relation; and prescribing to them the duties that are severally and peculiarly incumbent on them, and putting them on the same level with respect to their hopes of future reward, and their obligations to future punishment. And if men would only feel and act towards one another as the gospel of Christ exhorts, and entreats, and commands them to do; or could they be prevailed upon to make this the object of their sincere and constant endeavours, we should anticipate for them all the comfort and enjoyment of which they are capable in this imperfect state of being. A very slight acquaintance with the spirit and precepts of Christianity, must satisfy you of the correctness of this statement. And, therefore, if the treatment which you receive from those above you be oppressive, or injurious, or inhumane, let the demerit of all this

rest with them to whom it attaches, and let it not be imputed to Christianity, which has not only given no countenance to such proceedings, but which has prohibited them by the strictest enactments, and under the severest penalties. Rather be constrained by this circumstance, to put a firmer faith in it, and to cherish a stronger attachment to it. And since it bears such a decisive mark of having proceeded from the God of truth and mercy, and since it interposes its great authority, in order to secure for you whatever is just, and liberal, and kind, from those who might otherwise, as the history of the world shows us, have been disposed to keep you in cruel subjection, consider the men as neither just to it, nor merciful to you, who would shake your confidence in its truth, or destroy your reverence for its laws.

And then you must recollect, in the *third* place, that if Christianity be a religion from God, you are undeniably bound to follow its direction in the whole path of life. Whatever you may see others do, and whatever counsel others may give you, and whatever evils others may inflict upon you, it is not to the influence of these things that you must surrender yourselves—it is to the words of him who “speaketh from heaven” that you must attend, and it is by his instructions that you must be guided in all your ways. There may be some of his precepts which you will find it difficult to obey. He may require sacrifices of temper, and of passion, and of worldly advantage, which it will be painful to make. He may place you in circumstances from which the most powerful tendencies of your nature will prompt you to escape,

even at the expense of honor and of virtue. But still you must never forget that Divine authority is paramount to every thing; and that, acknowledging such authority to belong to Christ, the acknowledgement must be embodied in a conscientious obedience to all that he commands. And if he says that you should be "content with such things as ye have," that you should be patient under provocation and injury, that you should be "subject to the higher powers," that you should "give honor to whom honor, and tribute to whom tribute, is due," and that you should "follow the things that make for peace"—if he says all this, as he does say all this, and a great deal more to the same purpose, then it behoves you not only to practise it, but to practise it with that unqualified and uncomplaining submission, which you owe to the ruler of the world. You have in this case no alternative. Whenever you embrace Christianity, the precepts that I have now quoted from its moral system, demand your obedience as much as any other precept which it contains, and to violate or disregard them, must necessarily involve you in the guilt of practical infidelity.

I would press it upon you, in the *next* place, that Christianity, which some would have you to reject because it tends to degrade you and to keep you down, tends in fact, to exalt you to a higher place of estimation than you could otherwise have reached. There is nothing in it which dooms you to indigence or obscurity; on the contrary, it inculcates that line of conduct, which is best calculated to secure worldly prosperity. But its peculiar excellence consists in this, that what-

ever be your external condition, it teaches and enables you to sustain a character which raises you far above all secular distinctions, and gains for you the approbation of every one whose approbation is worthy of being possessed. Respectability, properly speaking, does not belong to mere station, but is the personal quality of him by whom the station is occupied. If you have the religious principles and the moral deportment which God requires you to have, then you are those whom God delighteth to honor. And upon him whom God delighteth to honor, though he dwell in the meanest hovel upon earth, it is not the prerogative of the highest of the children of men to look down with indifference or contempt. Angels regard him with complacency. And heaven is prepared for his reception. Had not Christianity shed its light upon the world, you could never have attained this spiritual rank. You should still have been as degraded in your moral, as you are destitute, perhaps, in your worldly circumstances. And, remember, it is back to this degenerate state that the apostles of infidelity would carry you. No, my friends, tell them that you know better in whom, and in what you have believed; that you have learned in the school of Christ, that to be his faithful and obedient disciples, is infinitely preferable to all the wealth and wisdom of a present world; that you will not, for whatever they may promise you of liberty, break that golden cord which binds you to the service of him who casts his compassionate eye upon you, and from the midst of all your indigence, "calls you to glory and to virtue;" and that in spite of their most art-

ful sophistry, you cannot but cling fast to a religion which teaches you, the poor ones of the earth, to rise to an eminence in the sight of God, which not many rich, not many wise, not many noble, have been able to attain.

And let me *finally* remind you, that the greater the hardships are with which you have to struggle, and the severer the distresses that you have to bear, the more firmly ought you to retain your hold of Christianity; because the more urgent, in these circumstances, is your need of comfort, and from Christianity alone can you draw the comfort that you require. Can those who advise you to abandon it secure you against calamity? Or when calamity comes, have they any thing that deserves the name of consolation to administer? Nay, were you to walk in their counsel, would it not aggravate all the miseries you feel a thousand fold, and would it not diminish, in the same proportion, whatever is fitted to support and to solace you? I trust that you are wise enough to see, that when you deny the truth and set at nought the authority of the gospel, you must at the same time, denude yourselves of every comfort which it gives, and of every hope which it inspires. And I trust, therefore, that when infidels endeavor to destroy your belief in it, you will steadfastly resist their efforts, and that while you are ready, if it shall be so ordered, to go into a still meaner and poorer condition than that which you now hold, you are also determined to carry along with you this heavenly record, which teaches you to confide in the wisdom and compassion of that Being who regu-

lates all your lot, and to look forward to an inheritance on high, which is "incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

V. The subject may be improved by its application to the preachers and ministers of the gospel.

It is the great object of the sacred office, to maintain a constant and powerful opposition to infidelity; and though the truth of Christianity does not in any degree depend on the conduct of those who fill it, yet certainly it may be concluded, from the very institution of our order, and from the nature of our functions, that Christianity will flourish or decay, according as we are faithful or unfaithful to the trust committed to us. A diligent and zealous performance of our duties must necessarily do much for upholding the faith of our people, and extending the influence, as well as the knowledge of the gospel. Inattention to these duties must necessarily go far to keep our people in ignorance of the gospel, or to make them indifferent to it, and to cherish in them the "evil heart of unbelief." These are results that we may always anticipate. Scripture speaks of them in the language of promise and of threatening; and experience is not wanting, in the state and history of the world, to show that we may count upon them with absolute certainty.

A complete illustration of this point is at present impracticable. But there are two particular views on which I would offer a few observations; the one relating to our general conduct, and the other to our mode of preaching.

First, as to our general conduct. One of the many ways by which infidels have labored to destroy the faith of mankind in the religion of Christ, is that of representing it as a mere human device, for gratifying the ambition of the priesthood, and keeping the multitude in due subjection. And if they can point to any facts which may help to justify this representation, it is easy to see how widely and efficiently it must operate to produce the effect at which they aim. Now, no facts can answer this purpose so well, as those which are found in the clerical character. If our deportment is at variance with the principles which we profess to inculcate; if, while we pretend to be leading others to heaven, we are fixing our own attachments and setting up our own rest upon earth; if anxiety to secure our secular emoluments preponderates over our anxiety to discharge the duties for which alone these are given; if we go through our work in that careless or perfunctory manner, which shows that we engage in it merely as a matter of necessity; if we are ready to sacrifice whatever is peculiar to our spiritual office, at the shrine of worldly ambition, or of worldly amusement; if we are satisfied with making the system that we teach an instrument for securing popular favor, or if we are in the habit of employing it as a tool for serving men in power, and promoting the interests of a party, and of attaching no more importance to it than what is derived from the accomplishment of these objects; in all these cases we give a distinct and most intelligible proof that we have not submitted ourselves to the authority of the gospel, that it has

not come home to us as a communication from God, that we consider it as little else than an engine of political craft, or of temporal interest, and that when we talk of its divine original, and of its spiritual nature, and of its eternal prospects, we are saying what we do not feel, and teaching what we do not believe. This is immediately laid hold of by the enemies of Christianity; and our inconsistency is converted by them into an argument against it. Without their aid, the people cannot fail to be struck with the actual testimony which we thus bear in our lives, against all that we address to them from the pulpit. And it is no great impeachment of their understanding to say, that they discover in it a sufficient apology, if not an enlightened reason, for discrediting and renouncing what they have hitherto received as a divine revelation. It is thus that we who are called and who undertake to defend religion, become promoters of infidelity, and, "causing the people to err, by our lies and by our lightness," become the most formidable adversaries of that truth, without the belief and obedience of which, neither they nor we can possibly be saved.

For avoiding these pernicious consequences, it is necessary that our conduct shall be in accordance with our doctrine. It must be seen, from unequivocal symptoms, that we are sincere and decided in our attachment to the religion that we teach. By its influence on our temper and deportment, we must evince that we have taken upon us the office of proclaiming and defending it, not for the sake of filthy lucre, but from a conviction of its being God's message to the children of

men. By the concern that we take in the spiritual welfare of those committed to us, we must leave them no room for doubting that we regard it as of vast and everlasting consequence to their souls. And by excluding all the pursuits of vanity and selfishness, and all unworthy deference to the censures and applauses of the world, and all the meannesses and artifices of a crooked policy, from our private and from our public ministrations, we must show that, in our esteem, Christianity is as pure and exalted in its nature, as it is unquestionable in its truth, and incalculable in its importance. In this way we shall not only prevent the enemies of the gospel from attacking it, as they have too often and too successfully done, with weapons furnished by our negligence and misconduct, but we shall give a tenfold energy to every argument that we employ in its support; and, while we keep believers steadfast in the faith, we shall also be instrumental in giving assurance to the wavering mind, in reclaiming those who had departed from Christ and from the living God, and in adding to the triumphs of Christianity over that extended and guilty opposition, which it has to encounter in all countries and in all ages.

Secondly, as to our mode of preaching the gospel; I hold that unless we make "*Christ and him crucified*," the great theme of our addresses, we not only cannot expect to succeed in our endeavors to maintain his religion, but must rather lay our account with seeing it languish and decay within the sphere of our pastoral labors, and of our pastoral influence.

There are many reasons for concluding that it is on account of the gospel having been so often

preached without any distinct reference to the atonement and righteousness of Jesus, that there comes at length to be no belief in him at all, among many who once adhered to his religion, and that many who, but for such misrepresentations of that religion, might have been led to embrace it, persevere in their infidelity. If those to whom we preach, are acquainted with the Scripture record, they cannot fail to see that Christ is represented there as something more than a mere teacher and example of righteousness. They must perceive that he is also held out as a Saviour from the guilt and the dominion of sin. They must be sensible that the very truth respecting his meritorious obedience to the death of the cross, which is treated with so much neglect, is the most prominent and the most frequent of all the truths which compose the system of Christianity, and that if it be taken away, Christianity is stripped of its distinguishing characteristic, and is no longer what it appears to be in the book of inspiration. And what is the effect of this? Why, that our testimony fails in creating a single favorable impression in their minds in behalf of the gospel; for they are necessitated to infer, either that we are ignorant of the gospel, and consequently that our opinion respecting its credibility and its truth is totally undeserving of respect; or that, knowing what the gospel really is, we are yet bold enough to mutilate and pervert it, and therefore, that our avowal of belief in it, and of attachment to its Author, must be nothing better than affectation and hypocrisy. And nothing can follow from the ignorance or the dishonesty which we thus exhibit to them, in our

mode of preaching Christ, so far as our preaching can effect their minds, but prejudice against that very system which it should have been employed to uphold and to recommend.

But again, supposing that we preach Christ to men who are not conversant with the gospel record, and who take their notions of its contents chiefly from the information of others, the consequence will be the very same. Keeping out of view all that is peculiar to Christianity, as a plan of grace and of redemption, we hold it up only as the depository of something which they may obtain in almost as great perfection from some other source. We set it before them as containing little else than a code of moral precepts, accompanied with one or two doctrinal statements, all of which they may find without any difficulty in the sayings of Socrates and of Cicero, or which they may be competent to ascertain with tolerable accuracy by the exercise of their own powers. And, of course, they will regard it as of very inferior importance: they can feel no lively interest in its author, and no gratitude to him for benefits comparatively so useless: they will make no exertion to cherish respect for it in their own minds, or to maintain its influence among their brethren; and thus it will gradually lose its hold of their belief, and leave them to decline into utter infidelity. Such is the case with many who will not study Christianity for themselves, and who submit, in a great measure, to the guidance of those whom they see professing it as a doctrine from heaven. And such is substantially the case with those who are unable to examine the external evidences of

the gospel, and who are principally susceptible of influence from perceiving its perfect adaptation to their spiritual circumstances. If we show them the gospel as a system in every respect suited to their need; if we hold out Christ to them as full of grace and power to deliver them from all the sins and miseries of their fallen state; if we press him on their attention in all the excellence, and efficacy, and glory, of his mediatorial work, there is awakened in their minds a powerful interest in behalf of him to whom their faith and their attachment are demanded, and they feel, in his complete and admirable suitableness to all their necessities as guilty, corrupted, and ruined creatures, an argument for the divinity of his mission infinitely superior to all the arguments which all the wisdom of the schools has ever been able to supply. And this is the argument which we employ, and this is the effect which we are likely to produce, when in preaching Christ to them we give a just and conspicuous place to the merits of his cross. But if in preaching him we keep the doctrine of a crucified Saviour, and the various peculiar doctrines connected with it, out of view; if we merely acknowledge Christ in vague and general terms; or if we confine ourselves to the recognising of him in his prophetic and in his kingly office, we present to them a cold and barren field of speculation; there is nothing in it to engage their affections—to rouse them by a sense of danger, or to relieve them by a sense of safety; the gospel is denuded of those charms by which alone it is attractive to fallen creatures; it no longer contains the promise and the offer of that eternal redemp-

tion which they are conscious that they need, and for which they would chiefly look, in the undertaking of a deliverer sent down from heaven; and, therefore, it is regarded by them with a great portion of that indifference which is nearly allied to unbelief, and those to whom our preaching Christ should have conveyed a decided testimony in favor of his religion, are thus provoked to set themselves against it as a scheme unsuitable to their case, and unworthy of their reception.

This part of the subject admits of a much more lengthened illustration: but the remarks that we have made may suffice to show, that when we preach Christ as we ought to do, we will distinctly acknowledge, and even lay particular emphasis on the merits of his cross. This we will do, not only from a regard to the truth of the case—not only from a desire to honor our Redeemer as to every part of his character and work—not only from a principle of consistency between our inward belief and our external avowal of it—not only from these motives, important and worthy as they are; but also from the persuasion that it is only in this way that our preaching can ever prove instrumental in supporting the credit and extending the influence of Christianity in the world.

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