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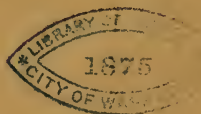
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SERMONS

BY THE LATE

✓
REV. DAVID OSGOOD, D. D.

MINISTER OF THE CHURCH IN MEDFORD.



BOSTON :

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DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, *to wit*:

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BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the fifteenth day of May A. D. 1824, in the forty-eighth year of the Independence of the United States of America, Cummings, Hilliard, & Co. of the said district, have deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, *to wit*:

“Sermons by the late Rev. David Osgood, D. D. Minister of the Church in Medford.”

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled “An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;” and also to an act, entitled “An act supplementary to an act, entitled ‘An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;’ and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints.”

JOHN W. DAVIS,

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ADVERTISEMENT.

Dr. Osgood was frequently urged by his friends to publish a volume of his sermons, but could never be prevailed on to undertake the task of revising them for the press. He however left permission with his family to make a selection if they should be requested, and himself named several of those which he was willing should be printed. Since his decease, it having appeared to be the general wish of his friends to possess some more lasting memorial of his preaching than what their own recollections afforded, his family have consented to publish the following posthumous sermons. In selecting them, care has been taken to follow the directions of the Author, who strictly forbade the publishing of any of those discourses which treated upon controversial topics, and named those which delineated the moral virtues. The discourse on the Institution of the Sabbath is the only one which was written for the press. It was composed when the Sabbath laws were revised by the General Court; but its publication at that time was delayed by accidental circumstances, and at length finally relinquished. It now appears in this volume, prefaced by the advertisement which was originally designed to accompany it. The other sermons in this selection were among the more popular discourses of the Author, and will be recollected, not only by

his own parishioners, but by many individuals in the adjacent towns.

An exposition of the Scriptures of the Old Testament formed one of Dr. Osgood's weekly exercises for many years, and at the close of the volume a few of these compositions have been added.

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SERMONS.

REVENUE

1867

By the Hon. the Comptroller and Exchequer

1867

There is a great deal of talk about the revenue, and it is not surprising that the public should be interested in it. The revenue is the lifeblood of the State, and it is the duty of the Government to see that it is properly managed. The revenue is the source of the funds which are used to pay the expenses of the Government, and it is the duty of the Government to see that it is properly managed.

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SERMON I.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.

DEUT. xxxii. 3.

Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.

TH**ES**E words are a part of that divine ode which the Legislator of Israel, at the command of God, wrote for the instruction and warning of the people. Nothing can be more grand and majestic than the exordium :

Give ear, O ye heavens ! and I will speak ;
And hear, O earth ! the words of my mouth.

As though man had no ears, the appeal is here made to the mute creation. After comparing the doctrine to be dispensed to the effects of the falling rain and distilling dew, the poet adds,

Because I will publish the name of the Lord ;
Ascribe ye greatness unto our God.

The subject of celebration being the perfections of Jehovah, the people are here invited to join in exalt-

ing his name, and from the fulness of their devout and grateful hearts to acknowledge and adore his supreme and universal dominion. The possessive pronoun, "*our* God," marks the peculiar and appropriating sense in which Jehovah was the God of Israel, in consequence of the explicit covenant subsisting between him and them. As Christians and the professing people of God, there is now the same covenant relation subsisting between him and ourselves. To us therefore the exhortation applies, "Ascribe ye greatness unto our God." Such ascriptions should proceed from hearts deeply impressed with a sense of his inconceivable greatness and glory, and affected, elevated, and warmed with the contemplation of him. We can hardly fail of being thus affected, if we think of his greatness in his BEING, PERFECTIONS, and WORKS.

I. In his BEING, or in its manner or duration, to whom may he be compared? The disparity between him and all other beings is infinite. They, as creatures, are the mere effects of his power. To suppose that they never might have been, or may cease to be, involves no contradiction. Once indeed they were not; and they now possess but a derived, dependent being, sustained solely by his power. But with respect to him, it is the peculiar and exclusive privilege of his nature to be self-existent and independent. The hypothesis of his not being, or ceasing to be, or being different from what he is, can, on no principle of reason, be admitted. In every

idea of him are included his eternity, his necessary self-existence, without beginning and without end. In thinking of other beings, we assign them an origin. We know ourselves to be but of yesterday, and that a few years since we were not. The earth itself was once without form and void ; neither man nor angel existed. The universe had a beginning. To the fictitious deities of the heathen their worshippers admitted an origin ; but with respect to the true God no supposition can be more absurd and contradictory. If you send your thoughts back into the dark regions of an eternity past, if you give imagination scope in figuring to itself millions and millions of ages prior to the birth of creation ; in this attempt you make no approach towards the origin of that Being who is without beginning. If you look forward, and give fancy the same scope in traversing the regions of futurity ; if you suppose all the revolutions predicted by prophecy to have passed, and, in addition to these, as many myriads of ages as there are particles of matter in the material system ; still, your calculations fail to increase the duration of God. No finite number of ages can make any addition to his years. It cannot be said that he has existed longer now, than he had when he created the world. For “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” “Behold ! God is great, and we know him not.” His days are not as the days of man, “neither can the number of his years be searched out.” Before the day was, be-

fore the mountains were brought forth, or he had formed the earth or the world, even from everlasting to everlasting he is God. Into what embarrassment and confusion do our thoughts run, while attempting thus to contemplate him! How is our understanding overwhelmed in its efforts to conceive of his infinity!

II. His greatness is equally incomprehensible in all and each of his PERFECTIONS. Other beings are circumscribed in some definite place. No creature can occupy two different and distant places at the same time. Within what narrow limits are we ourselves confined! This earth itself, though it contains all the nations of men, with innumerable other creatures, affording room amply sufficient for all, is yet but a speck or a point, compared with the immense spaces of the universe, always filled with the divine presence. God is neither included under any limits, nor excluded from any place or point in any direction through unbounded extension. "The heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him." "Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." In humble adoration of his omnipresence, the Psalmist exclaims, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand hold me."

As he is every where *present*, so he has all *power*. “Once have we heard this, yea twice, that power belongeth unto God.” To his creatures he has imparted a degree of power sufficient for certain purposes pertaining to their accommodation and means of subsistence. Some little things can be done by them ; but with him all things are possible, and nothing is too hard for him. Whatsoever the Lord pleaseth, that doth he in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places, working all things after the counsel of his own will.

This will is guided by an *understanding* strictly infinite, comprehending all things and events at the same instant. Whatever has been, is, or shall be, is always present to his view. Nothing is hidden from him or escapes his notice. He sees into all hearts, and discerns the most secret thoughts and purposes in every human mind,—all things being naked and open to his inspection. From everlasting he has beheld the whole chain of events with all their relations and intermediate links, from the beginning of time through the extent of unbounded futurity. From this perfect knowledge results his unerring and consummate wisdom. “He hath established the world by his wisdom, and stretched out the heavens by his discretion.” “Manifold are his works, and in wisdom hath he made them all.” Whatever portion of knowledge and wisdom is exercised by creatures, is derived from him. It cometh down from the Father of lights, who giveth liberally to them who ask, and rightly improve his gifts.

His *goodness* is as great and unlimited as his other perfections. It is the chief glory of his nature and character. To the petition of Moses, "I beseech thee shew me thy glory," he graciously answers, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee,"—intimating this to be his glory. Compared with God, the best of finite beings are not worthy to be called *good*. Our Saviour tells us, "that there is none good but one, and that is God." His goodness is absolute, unmixed, underived, independent, and unbounded. It overflows the whole creation, and supplies the streams which convey happiness to the universe of creatures.

With his goodness as a moral perfection, are inseparably connected his *truth* and *faithfulness*. He is a God of truth, and it is not possible for him to alter the thing that is gone out of his lips. His word is settled in the heavens, and his faithfulness is unto all generations. Heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, than a word of his shall fall to the ground. In his other moral perfections, he is equally unchangeable and unrivalled. There are none *holy* as the Lord. He is also a *just* God, loving righteousness and hating iniquity, and who will by no means clear the guilty. At the same time his *mercy* is higher than the heavens, and his compassions fail not.

III. But as he is great in all the attributes of his nature and character; so is he in his *works*, both of *creation* and *providence*. In these, the invisible

things of him, even his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, are manifested. If we consider the things which he has made either in their magnitude, their extent, their number, their variety, their beauty, their usefulness, or their manner of production,—in each of these respects, they lead us to the most admiring and adoring apprehensions of his unsearchable greatness and glory. In the Gospel we find the disciples of our Saviour admiring the grandeur and workmanship of the temple at Jerusalem. In their superb palaces, temples, towers, and other edifices, the kings of the earth have been ambitious of making a display of their greatness and magnificence. But what are all human structures, even those called the wonders of the world, in comparison with the fabrick of the universe? What are all other architects to Him who buildeth his stories in the heavens? If we consider the creation as it appears to the vulgar eye, or according to the plain and simple account of it given in Scripture; if we think of God as laying the foundations of the earth, hanging it upon nothing, bringing this beautiful and well furnished world into being, preparing the bottomless abyss as a prison for his enemies; erecting the third heaven as the presence chamber of the great King, those beatific mansions forming the promised seats of the blessed; and as hanging out in the firmament below, the heavenly luminaries, the sun, moon, and stars—those splendid symbols of uncreated glory and magnificence,—what august

ideas of the Author rush upon and overwhelm our understandings!

Views still more extended are held forth by the light of philosophy. The learned profess, with a degree of accuracy, to ascertain the circumference and diameter of the earth, to calculate its bulk, and to assure us that though it be so prodigious, there are other planets belonging to the solar system still greater; that the sun itself, the source of all their light and heat, is of a magnitude so vast, that in comparison with it, this earth is but a mere spot—that besides his regular planets, there are many other bodies falling within the compass of his attraction, called comets, consisting of huge masses of matter, far surpassing the bulk of this earth—that beyond all these, in the trackless fields of ether, or rather in the immensity of space, are what are called the fixed stars, glistening through all parts of the heavenly canopy, yet so inconceivably distant as to have no sensible connexion with our solar system. As they appear to shine by their own native light, it has been conjectured that they may all be so many suns, each, like ours, encircled by its system of planets, or worlds; and all these inhabited by creatures whose natures and capacities may be infinitely diversified, filling up numberless gradations in the scale of created existence. We are lost and swallowed up in such contemplations. “Who, by searching, can find out God,” or ascertain the number or extent of his works, or announce to us their limits? So far

as we are able to survey them, they are as beautiful and useful, as they are grand and stupendous ; bearing upon them order and uniformity of design amidst the most complicated variety. As adapted to the enjoyment of sensitive beings, and to enlarge and improve the faculties of rational, intelligent natures, we are constrained to view them as so many streams of good, emanating from the infinite, inexhaustible fountain. Well may we ascribe *greatness* to their author ! What works, or whose, may be compared with his ?

In constructing the dwellings of man, the united skill and strength of numbers are requisite ; but God neither had nor needed assistance in rearing the fabrick of nature. Men must have materials, instruments, and engines, or they cannot build ; but if God made use of pre-existent materials in forming the world, they were such as he himself had created. In every case, his word, LET IT BE, was sufficient for the instantaneous production. Well might the morning stars sing and shout for joy, when they beheld the frame of nature rising, the heavens expanding, and this visible universe assuming order and form.

In contemplating his works of *providence*, as well as those of *creation*, we may find equal reason for ascribing *greatness* to our God. As the universe was made by his power, so it is sustained and governed by his providence. Wherever he has given existence to creatures, there the continued energy of his providence upholds their being and provides

for them. This energy is spread through the whole creation to a minuteness which our thoughts cannot pursue, and to an universality that admits of no exemption. Throughout creation, in the outlying regions of the universe as well as at the centre of the earth, the immediate action of his providence binds together the parts and particles of matter, constitutes their solidity, maintains the laws of motion, and regulates every movement; pervading, surrounding, and governing the whole, every change and event, from the greatest to the most minute, even to the deciding upon the life of a sparrow, and adjusting the number of hairs on every head. It is by the unremitting agency of his providence that the several parts and members of our bodies are held together, that our organs of sense perform their functions, that the blood flows in our veins, and the breath heaves our lungs. It is IN HIM that we live, and move, and breathe, and have our being.

As in the *natural*, so in the *moral world*, he superintends whatever takes place, doing his pleasure among the armies of heaven above, and among the inhabitants of the earth below. The affairs of all nations, families, and of each individual, are the objects of his care. To none of all these does any evil happen, or any good accrue, without his appointment. The rectitude of his administration, the justice and mercy of his character, are displayed in rendering to men according to their works, not perfectly indeed or in every instance during this probationary

state, but so far as ought to give us ample assurance of its completion hereafter. His present works of terror and compassion in his judgments upon the wicked, and his deliverances to the righteous, are certain pledges of a future full retribution to all and every one. This inference is forced upon us by the general history of his dispensations towards mankind from the earliest ages; in his saving Noah and his family, while he brought a flood of waters on the world of the ungodly; in rescuing righteous Lot from the flames which consumed the sinners of Sodom; in delivering his ancient Israel from the bondage of Egypt, and in preserving them from the plagues inflicted on their oppressors; and in all the wonders which attended them before and after their settlement in Canaan, through the lapse of a long course of ages, till they were rejected from being his people.

Wonders also both of judgment and of mercy have attended the planting, increase, and preservation of the christian church amidst the continual opposition of earth and hell. Towards no part of this church, in modern times, have the dispensations of Providence been more illustrious and signal, perhaps, than to that planted in these New England states. Our ears have heard and our fathers have told us what great things were done for them in their day.* Since we ourselves have been upon the stage, scenes have opened and revolutions taken

* This sermon was preached on the day of the general Thanksgiving for Peace, April 13th, 1815.

place, before unparalleled in the annals of time. Our minds have been roused by their astonishing nature, and kept in constant agitation by their quick succession. After viewing them for a while at a distance, we found ourselves suddenly drawn into the current, and borne along with an alarming rapidity towards hopeless ruin. Our perplexities, fears, and dangers increased every moment. But at a period when the prospect was most gloomy and threatening, when we seemed on the verge of destruction, and no means of safety were within our reach,—the tempest ceased, the clouds broke and dispersed, and our horizon became clear and tranquil. “Ascribe ye greatness to our God.” Him the winds and the waves obey. He having said, “peace, be still,” we are surprised at the sudden and great calm,—we are most agreeably surprised that we hear no longer the sound of the trumpet and the dire alarm of war.

In history we read of Alexander, of Pompey, of Charlemagne, of Lewis the Fourteenth, and of a few others, who, from the noise and bustle which they made in the world, their victories and triumphs over their fellow-worms, were distinguished by the epithet of *great* added to their names. But what could be the greatness of vanishing phantoms, beings themselves shadows, and shadows their enterprises and achievements? At most and at best they were but instruments in the hand of Him, whose kingdom ruleth over all; and in their

exploits, whatever they might have been, they effected nothing more than his hand and his counsel had before determined to be done. In nothing can his rational creatures become truly great, but by endeavours to imitate his moral perfections, his holiness, truth, and justice, his mercy and goodness. By forming ourselves to a resemblance of him in these respects, we may become his adopted children, and in this relation be regarded as heirs of God, and joint heirs with his son Christ Jesus to honour and immortality.

SERMON II.

FOUNDATION STONE.

ISAIAH xxviii. 16.

Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

IN this figurative language, the evangelical prophet sets forth the Messiah as the only sure foundation of hope for apostate men. That the words are thus to be understood, is put beyond a doubt by their being so interpreted by the writers of the New Testament. They are quoted both by St. Peter and St. Paul, and expressly applied to Christ. Isaiah opposes this only sure and safe foundation to that groundless confidence, that refuge of lies, under which the degenerate Israelites were accustomed to shelter themselves. In the context, the judgments of God, like a tempest of hail, or an overflowing flood, are represented as ready to burst upon this sinful people. They, however, instead of being alarmed at the threatened danger, were as se-

cure and unconcerned as though they had made a covenant with death not to approach them, and were at an agreement with hell, or the grave, that it should not swallow them up. Whatever was the ground of this their confidence, it is pronounced by the prophet to be fallacious. *Therefore*, or in contradistinction to all the schemes of worldly wisdom and policy, the text declares, in God's name, that he is about to lay a stable foundation for the confidence of true believers,—a foundation with every property necessary to sustain the spiritual temple of Jehovah, the edifice of his church. In allusion to those famous structures of antiquity, which were once the wonder of the world, whose foundations were laid amidst the acclamations of a crowd of admiring spectators; or, perhaps, in allusion to the foundation of nature itself, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy; the attention of all contemplative beings, whether on earth or in heaven, is summoned to the bringing forth of the great corner-stone of God's living temple, the church. "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation."

When we consider, my brethren, who and what we are, our present situation, the changes which await us, the destination of our being; and the prospects before us as probationers for eternity, we cannot but feel the importance of looking out for some sure foundation on which to build our happiness. What trials are in reserve for us personally,

as individuals, we know not. Losses, bereavements, sicknesses, and manifold calamities, may form the scenes through which we have yet to pass. At all events, the catastrophe of death awaits each one of us; and what a building must that be which the king of terrors shall not demolish! "Besides, when all the purposes of divine love, in our world, shall be accomplished, an almighty tempest of divine indignation shall break upon it, and sweep away all that it contains, blending cities, kingdoms, plains and mountains, seas and dry land, kings and beggars, in one vast heap of promiscuous ruin." Our happiness must be built upon a foundation that will stand the shock of that tremendous day; that will remain unmoved when the foundations of nature shall be shaken and give way; that will afford us a firm support, while the earth under our feet, and the heavens over us, shall be passing away with a great noise. Where, it is natural most anxiously to inquire, shall we find such a basis for our hopes? Where shall we find that rock, on which we may stand secure amidst the convulsions of a falling world? The text directs our eyes to the only sure, solid, immoveable, everlasting rock, on which we may build, safely build, our eternal all. The voice of God himself calls our attention to this foundation. "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold." Multitudes of our degenerate race, while floating along on the surface of time towards the vast ocean of eternity, are accustomed, in a manner

the most heedless, to sport themselves by the way, wholly unapprehensive of what is before them. Some of the more considerate, full of themselves, think their own reason sufficient to lay a foundation, on which to build for an hereafter. Much the greater part spend their time and thoughts about the objects of sense. All their care and concern are taken up in providing for the body, to the utter neglect of the soul. In compassion to his perishing creatures, a merciful God calls, calls with a voice from heaven, to rouse them from this lethargy, from these fatal slumbers, now in season to attend to the provision which he has made, the foundation which he has laid for their recovery and salvation. To each of us he says, in the text, Behold the rock that will afford you a firm support amidst all those convulsions which will whelm in ruin every structure not raised upon this foundation.

The mere moralist is here shown a surer basis for hope than his own fancied goodness. Works in themselves really good are necessary to complete and adorn the superstructure; but when laid at the bottom as the foundation, you build upon the yielding sand. This was the mistake of the Jewish builders of old, when they refused the stone appointed by God to be the head of the corner. How great was their mistake! How fatal their consequent ruin!

Let scorning infidels remember, that, if they continue to set at nought this only foundation stone, the day will come when all the schemes of their own

devising will be found but a refuge of lies ; and what they now slight, as a stone of stumbling and rock of offence, will return upon them with a weight which will grind them to powder.

Behold, ye men of the world, all whose endeavours are exerted in building up an earthly felicity ; what will become of your labours, when that vapour, your life, shall vanish ? Of what profit will the gain of the whole world be, when your souls shall be lost ? Ye are now called to turn your eyes to a foundation for better and greater expectations, for riches more durable, honours more exalted, pleasures more sublime, than can result from any worldly success.

Let the crowd of inconsiderate, thoughtless beings, who seem to have no settled plan either for this world or the next, who are sauntering away their existence, who stand all the day idle,—let them attend to what is now set before them, a foundation upon which their labour shall not be in vain, upon which they may build, successfully build for immortality.

Behold, ye awakened, inquiring sinners, who are pricked in your hearts, who see your guilt and your danger, and are ready to sink under the apprehension of the gathering tempest ; behold, with admiration and joy, this rock upon which ye may cast yourselves, venture your souls, and be safe for eternity. To encourage you in placing your dependence upon this foundation, the text assures you that it is

laid by God himself. Were it a mere human device, it might not be worthy of your notice. The schemes of happiness, devised by human wisdom and philosophy, are at best slight and superficial. All human foundations are sandy and fallacious; but may you not rely upon that which is laid in the consummate wisdom and infinite power of God? When his creature man apostatized, he looked and saw that there was none to help; then his own arm brought salvation—he laid help upon one who is mighty. He so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten Son, to seek and to save that which was lost. Jesus Christ coming into the world, assuming our nature as the second man, the second head of the human family; fulfilling all righteousness on our behalf, and then, dying as our substitute the death incurred by the first man, is the foundation, the only foundation for our recovery and salvation. Upon this foundation, all believers, from the beginning to the end of the world, build their hopes—upon this stands the whole church, and not one of Adam's posterity ever was or can be saved upon any other foundation.

When God was about to bring forth this foundation stone, he called for the attention of the children of men. "Behold, I lay for a foundation in Zion;"—Zion, a word metaphorically denoting the church of God. As Christ is the rock on which the church is founded, it is plain, that if we would find and build upon this foundation, we must be-

long to his church, we must become lively stones in this temple. If we belong not to this structure, if we be not parts of this sacred building, we cannot rest upon its foundation. Christ will profit us nothing. Ought not this to be seriously considered by those among us who seem to regard it as a matter of indifference, whether they be members of the church of Christ or not. Many indeed, by an outward profession, pass at present for members, who will hereafter be found as a mere appendage or scaffolding of the spiritual edifice, and when the building is finished, be removed as rubbish, useless incumbrances. But when judgment shall thus begin at the house of God; when mere nominal professors shall be cast off; what must become of those who have no connexion with this sacred temple, who neither are, nor appear to be of the church of Christ? Of what avail can the foundation be to those who build not upon it?

As an encouragement to one and all here to found their hopes, the excellent properties of this foundation are particularized—"a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." What a variety of words are here accumulated, to express the solidity, strength, durability, and perfection of this foundation! A *stone*, of all materials the most solid and durable; not to be impaired or worn away by all-consuming time. Where now are the noble structures of antiquity, the grand imperial cities, the famous temples and lofty towers, so

celebrated in history? They have long since been heaps of rubbish; their very foundations, scattered fragments; while the *rock of ages* is always the same, immutable and immoveable through the ages both of time and eternity. The temple of God, that spiritual building, his church, founded upon this rock, has survived amidst all the vicissitudes of past time. It still stands firm and glorious as ever, and has reared its towering spires above the stars. It hath bidden defiance to all the storms and tempests which have beaten against it. No inundations have overflowed it. No convulsions have shaken its foundation. The latter remains precisely the same now that it was when Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and the other patriarchs built their faith and their hope upon it. Still the spacious fabrick is rising, and new stones are daily added; while the foundation is sufficiently strong to bear all the past and all future additions to the end of time, and then to support the whole through all eternity.

A tried stone, says the prophet. In various respects Christ has been tried by God and his creatures, by his friends, and by his enemies. From the beginning he was intimately known, approved, and chosen by God, for the purpose of this foundation. In the days of his flesh, from his first appearance on earth, from his birth in a stable, to his exit on the cross, his whole life was a constant series of the severest trials, manifesting his perfect submission to God, and his unconquerable love to men,

even to enemies ; rendering them both illustrious and splendid as gold from the furnace. In another respect he has been tried, tried as a Saviour, by multitudes of perishing sinners, whose happy experience attests the excellence of the foundation upon which they have built their hope. All believers through every past age have experienced his ability and willingness to save. Thousands and thousands of immortal souls, once the captives of Satan, led in chains by him towards the bottomless gulf, by laying hold on this rock have escaped perdition. The penitent thief, while expiring on the cross, who had no opportunity to build, nor for any thing more than just to cast his departing soul upon this foundation, by this single effort found himself safe for eternity.

But again, he is called *a precious corner-stone*, importing his place in the temple of God, and the unity, strength, and beauty which he communicates to the whole structure. He is the centre of union in this spiritual building, incorporating Jews and Gentiles, believers of all nations and throughout all ages, in one vast and happy society. The materials of this house of God consist of all nations, kindreds, and tongues ; Jews and Greeks, Barbarians and Scythians, bond and free, honourable and dishonourable, rich and poor. All these Christ unites and binds to himself and to one another, in the bonds of fraternal affection ; inspiring them with the same spirit, love, faith, and hope. By these ties he links

them to each other during the period of their dispersion and pilgrimage here on earth, and will finally bring them to meet together and dwell forever in one blessed communion in heaven. "He is our peace," says the Apostle, "who hath made both one (that is, Jews and Gentiles), and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;" that so all the different parts of his church might form but one grand structure, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

A sure foundation, says the Prophet. In the Hebrew, *a foundation, a foundation*. "There is," says the animated Hervey, "a fine spirit of vehemence in the sentence thus understood; it speaks the language of agreeable surprise and exultation, and expresses an important discovery. That which mankind infinitely want; that which multitudes seek and find not;—it is here! it is here! This, this is the foundation for their pardon, their peace, their eternal felicity!"

My hearers, will ye not be persuaded to build upon this foundation? Sinners, will ye not cast yourselves upon this rock? Already ye are sinking under guilt and condemnation. Here is the only rock upon which ye can be safe. "Other foundation," says the Apostle, "can no man lay, than that already laid, which is Jesus Christ." Ye

have heard of the ample sufficiency and excellence of this; how to build upon it, you are directed in the text; "he that believeth," clearly teaching that you must build by faith, by believing what the Scripture reveals concerning Christ as a foundation, and by resting upon him the eternal interests of your souls. Faith is the exercise of the heart, as well as of the understanding. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Were you plunged in the ocean, and there struggling for life amidst the buffeting waves, the rock within your reach could be no support till you cast yourselves upon it. Sinking, perishing sinners hear of Christ as a foundation. He is nigh to them in his word and in his ordinances, while they, blind to their perilous condition, make no efforts to get upon this rock. Like drowning men bereft of reason, they lay hold on every twig, on every straw, still neglecting the rock. Faith implies trust in Christ and reliance upon him for safety; but ye cannot thus trust in him while ye remain insensible of your danger. Ye must feel yourselves sinking under the burden of your sins, and under this feeling apply to Christ, crying with sinking Peter, "Help, Lord, we perish." Ye must lay hold on him as your only support, letting go all other confidences, and clinging to him as your only hope. Your faith in him must result at once from the last necessity and the freest choice; from a deep conviction of your infinite need of him, and from a well-pleasèdness with his character and

offices. It must also have a transforming influence upon your hearts and lives, rendering you new creatures. If your faith be evangelical, ye will yourselves become lively stones, and partake of the excellencies and splendours of that precious stone upon which ye are built. The foundation communicates, not only support and strength, but beauty and excellence to the whole structure and to all its parts. A degree of likeness to Christ, and something of his temper, are found in the character of all and each of his members.

The last words in the text set forth the advantages resulting to those who are thus built upon this sure foundation: "he that believeth," says the Prophet, "shall not make haste,"—"shall not be ashamed or confounded," says the Apostle. Both ideas are included in its import. In the former sense, it marks the confused hurry, the disorder and perturbation into which men are thrown by any sudden consternation. In the latter sense, it expresses the regret, chagrin, and confusion, which overwhelm the mind on the failure of its confidence, and the disappointment of its hopes. From all these evils, true believers in Christ are happily freed. Let come what may, amidst all vicissitudes, they are secure, and may in patience possess their souls. Knowing in whom they have believed, upon whom they have placed their dependence, what their foundation is; they shall feel themselves safe upon this rock, whatever storms may blow, whatever convul-

sions may shake the world. In the last extremity, in the shipwreck of nature, when the earthly house of their tabernacle shall be dissolved, they will know that they have a building of God on Christ as the foundation. Sustained by this hope, they will be calm and serene, not only when bidding adieu to the world, but even when beholding the prognostics of a dissolving world. When the heavens and the earth shall pass away, they will be able to look for a new heaven and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness.

Come then, ye weary and heavy laden, cast yourselves upon this foundation, and ye shall find rest to your souls,—a support for your hope when all earthly hopes shall fail and give way. Ye shall be confident at death, confident at the resurrection of the just, and confident at the general judgment. When others shall fly in wild haste to the dens and to the caves of the earth, and shall shriek to the rocks and to the mountains for shelter, “ye shall not make haste, nor be ashamed,” but look for the second coming of the Son of man as a blessed hope, a glorious appearance, the day of your finished redemption.

SERMON III.

DISTINCTION OF GOOD AND EVIL.

ISAIAH v. 20.

Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.

THESE words, with the preceding and subsequent context, charge God's ancient people with the want of that righteousness which alone exalteth a nation, and with the practice of those sins and vices, which fail not, sooner or later, to bring reproach and ruin upon any people. They are represented as covetous and rapacious, intemperate, sensual, and luxurious; profligate and abandoned in their manners; atheistical and licentious in their principles. Eager and impetuous in the gratification of their lusts, "they drew iniquity with cords of vanity." By idle pretexts and sophistical arguments, they encouraged and promoted the practice of vice—*drawing* it along like a plough, by keeping it in perpetual action. Fixed in these evil habits, they bade defiance to the judgments of Heaven, and despised all the warnings

and threatenings of the Almighty. In answer to the denunciations of the prophets, they are described as saying in scorn and ridicule, "let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it."

With this contempt of God and religion, they at length degenerated into such stupidity and wickedness, as to lose all sense of the distinction between moral good and evil. Though, to the eye of reason, the difference be as manifest as that between light and darkness, or as bitter and sweet is to the taste; yet, by abandoning themselves to all manner of vice, and the most criminal excesses, many of the Jews destroyed their moral sense, and became so stupid and brutish as to confound the distinctions between virtue and vice. In this stage of their degeneracy, they became advocates for wickedness, and sanctified their vices by giving them the name of virtues. This brought upon them the denunciation in the text—"Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."

In illustrating this passage of Scripture, it is proposed to remark,

First, Upon the proneness of sinful men to confound the distinction betwixt moral good and evil, and to practise the latter under the name of the former.

Second, To inquire whence this comes to pass, or the causes of it.

Third, Show that notwithstanding they are so often confounded in the opinions and practice of men, there is yet a real, essential, and immutable difference between them; and then

Fourth, That God in the administration of his moral government over mankind, will ultimately support this distinction, and of course bring misery and ruin upon all who obstinately persist in disregarding it. I am in the

First place, To remark upon the proneness of sinful men to confound the distinction betwixt moral good and evil, and to practise the latter under the name of the former. The character especially referred to in the text, is that of the most abandoned sinners, who by a continued course of profligacy and guilt, have at length become shameless in vice, and lost to all sense and feeling of moral propriety. These, and these only, are the men who professedly confound good and evil, and disclaim in general the distinction between them. In the days of Isaiah, such characters abounded at Jerusalem. And though in some places and at some times they are more numerous than at others, yet through all ages and in all nations, there is a greater or less proportion of these licentious profligates. You may almost every where find some unprincipled people who have no fixed ideas of the nature of virtue and vice, and are accustomed to call every thing good or evil,

according as it happens to favour or thwart their predominant inclinations.

But besides those who have thus sunk themselves to the last degree of degeneracy and corruption—such is the general frailty or depravity of human nature, that if we look abroad in the world, or attend to what history has recorded of the manners and opinions of men,—we shall find that there are scarcely any who do not, in some instances, call evil good, and good evil. Admitting that justice, truth, fidelity, and gratitude are approved and commended; and that their opposites, fraud, falsehood, treachery, and ingratitude are censured and condemned by the general suffrage of mankind; yet when these great and cardinal virtues and vices are carried forth into particular instances, and placed in circumstances favourable or unfavourable to the wishes and pursuits of individuals, there are few who do not in their practice confound them, and in their reasoning attempt to excuse and justify themselves by putting darkness for light, and light for darkness.

Even they who are reputed good men, are sometimes guilty of strange mistakes in their dealings with others. We are often astonished at the deviations from rectitude which we find in our neighbours, even while they themselves perhaps are wholly insensible of them. And would we be as severe in judging ourselves, we should probably find reason to exclaim, “who of us can understand his errors?” At the time

we act, we think that we are right; but when passion has subsided, or when we are no longer influenced by interest or prejudice, we may then discern the unfitness of what we have done or what we have thought and said, and see that we have put darkness for light. But I proceed,

Secondly, To inquire whence it comes to pass that men are so prone to confound good and evil, or what are the causes of it. To account for this may seem the more difficult, when it is considered with what accuracy we distinguish between natural good and evil, and those things which are grateful and ungrateful to our senses. Light and darkness, bitter and sweet, are never confounded. Neither our sight nor taste ever mistakes the one for the other. The feelings of every man enable him to distinguish between sickness and health, pleasure and pain, riches and poverty, honour and disgrace. These things are never confounded in our desires and pursuits. It might be expected that creatures endowed with reason and the moral sense, would judge as infallibly with respect to moral qualities. But here, alas! our mistakes are numberless. Various circumstances conspire to delude and mislead us. Our senses soon arrive at maturity, and we are early in a capacity to judge of their objects. But the progress of reason is slow, and many years elapse before we attain to accurate or enlarged ideas of moral qualities. The things pleasing or offensive to our senses are immediately discerned; but a train of

reasoning is often requisite in order to a just decision in morals. The effects of natural good and evil are usually quick and speedy, but those of virtue and vice are frequently remote and distant. This circumstance, together with the weakness of reason, greatly contributes to our delusion.

But a yet more powerful cause are our irregular and depraved propensities. In consequence of the original apostacy, our inclinations have received a strong bias to evil. They lean upon the wrong side in opposition to the dictates of reason and conscience. These latter, which were designed to be ruling faculties in man, are so debilitated by sin, as frequently to fall under the power of the inferior propensities. Lust and passion gain the ascendancy. Their exorbitant cravings pervert the judgment in favour of their objects. And under this corrupt influence, we confound the nature of things, putting evil for good, and good for evil. We easily persuade ourselves to believe those things to be lawful and good, which we passionately desire; and on the other part, we as readily admit those to be evil, from which we have a rooted aversion. Thus our depraved desires and affections become the most general source of the guilt described in the text. And they who are most enslaved to their lusts, are usually the most lost to a sense of the distinctions between good and evil.

Other causes however have an influence in producing this effect. False notions of religion, bigot-

ry and superstition, have a surprising sway over the opinions of men with respect to morals. The vices, impurities, and dissolution of manners, which prevailed among the ancient heathen, were the obvious effects of their corruptions in religion. Having become vain in their imaginations, and lost to the knowledge of the true God, they formed to themselves idol deities, to whom they ascribed characters which could belong to none but the most abandoned and profligate of men. To these fictitious deities, they paid their religious homage. And having judged such objects worthy of their devotions, they of course considered their example and character as worthy of imitation, and as the highest model which they could propose to themselves. Hence in imitation of their gods, they gave themselves up to vile affections, being filled with "unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, deceit, malignity." And while immersed in all these pollutions, in sins contrary not only to reason, but to nature itself, they still remained insensible of their guilt. Being of a reprobate mind and a seared conscience, they ceased to distinguish between light and darkness in a moral sense.

In proportion as the ancient Jews declined to idolatry, and joined with the heathen around them in their superstitions, they became addicted to their vices, and were equally stupid and depraved in their morals. And after they were reclaimed from idolatry in the literal sense, superstition led them to place

religion in rites and forms, and in tithing mint, annise, and cummin, to the neglect of judgment, mercy, and faith. Hence they continued, and many of them to this day still continue, to confound moral good and evil.

The effects of superstition in perverting men's notions of good and evil, were not more striking among Jews or Pagans, than they have been among Christians. In direct opposition to the plainest precepts of the Gospel, the latter in various instances have been accustomed to put darkness for light, and light for darkness; setting aside the most essential virtues and graces of religion, and substituting the most idle forms in their place. Nay, under the baneful influence of superstition, the different sects and persuasions among Christians have been led to hate and persecute each other; and to believe that the more furious and bloody they were, the more acceptable they would thereby render themselves to the benevolent Father of the universe. The history of the christian church abounds with instances of such a spirit. In a greater or less degree, all parties and denominations have been chargeable with it, and, under the influence of false ideas of religion, have been led to violate the plainest rules of morality.

But as another cause of our confounding good and evil, may be reckoned habit and custom, common practice and the example of principal and leading characters among a people. The commis-

sion of an unlawful action, at first is usually followed with concern and remorse; but after it has been often repeated, and the habit of doing it is formed, the mind by degrees loses a sense of its culpability, and at length, perhaps, reflects upon it with approbation. In this way, many have proceeded from evil to evil, till they have arrived at such a pitch of depravity as to glory in their shame, make a mock of sin, and boast of the foulest vices. And when any particular vice is common among a people, each individual is prone to consider the general practice as an excuse for himself.

Many indeed seem to have no other ideas of good and evil, but what they derive from human laws, or from the maxims and practice of others around them. What they see done by their superiors in wealth, rank, or station, they often imitate without scruple. Under the patronage of great examples, they think themselves secure, though they disregard all the duties of religion and all the rules of virtue. Few are willing to be at the trouble of judging for themselves, or of comparing their actions with the dictates of reason and the precepts of Scripture. Many there are, who take up with the judgments of others, and are satisfied with themselves, if their conduct be conformed to the fashion and general custom of the world. With them, therefore, virtue and vice change their nature, and are as variable and uncertain as is the test by which they try them. But I pass on,

Thirdly, To show, that notwithstanding good and evil are so frequently confounded in the sentiments and practice of men, there is yet a real, essential, and immutable difference between them. This difference is in the text represented as fixed and unchangeable, as is that between light and darkness, bitter and sweet. It is not accidental or arbitrary. It results not from law or power, but from the nature of things and the moral faculties of men. Moral good and evil are the proper object of our rational powers. To discern the distinction between them, is the peculiar office of reason. Those powers of reflection which lead us from the things made, to acknowledge a Maker, and to ascribe all possible perfection to the great First Cause of all, do, at the same time, enable us, with equal clearness and certainty, to discriminate in our actions, and to consider some as good and praiseworthy, and others as evil and blameworthy. If we acknowledge the moral perfections of the Deity, and attribute to him holiness, justice, truth, and goodness; whatever we find in ourselves contrary to these perfections, our reason obliges us to censure as evil and culpable.

From the obvious relation in which we stand to God, our Maker, there evidently results a difference in our actions. As we know that we ourselves exist, so we know as certainly that there must be a God who has made us and all other creatures. If we consider him as having supreme and unlimited power, we cannot but feel that it is our duty and

interest to revere and stand in awe of him. If he be perfect love and goodness, this idea of him constrains our love to him. And his unerring wisdom should induce us to trust in, depend upon, and submit to him in all his dispensations. The evil of opposite dispositions or exercises of heart in us with reference to these divine perfections, is as manifest as is the difference between darkness and light. If we believe him to be our Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, we cannot doubt of our obligations to love and obey him. For surely he who has given us life with all the comforts of life, is entitled to our gratitude and best services. The difference therefore between moral good and evil, is as evident as is the relation in which creatures stand to their Creator.

It is also equally manifest from the relation in which mankind stand to one another. No one doubts of his own right to truth, justice, fidelity, and gratitude from his neighbours. Of course, he cannot deny his obligations to practise these virtues in his social intercourse with them. And how necessary they are to the very subsistence of society, is also equally evident. Accordingly it appears from the most ancient history, that God expected the moral virtues of men previous to any express injunctions from him concerning them. We have heard of no revealed law against murder, when that crime was first perpetrated, and yet the divine vengeance set a mark upon the murderer. Neither the old world, nor

the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, nor the nations of Canaan had any standing revelation to direct them ; yet the waters of the flood, fire and brimstone from heaven, and the exterminating armies of Israel, were the inflictions of the Almighty for sins against the light of nature and reason. In the judgment of the great Ruler of the world, they had a law written in their hearts which ought to have restrained them from the vices into which they plunged. But a small part of mankind, comparatively, have been by revelation taught the difference between moral good and evil ; yet through all ages, and among all nations, this difference has been generally acknowledged. By a few individuals, indeed, at different periods, it may have been called in question. But these individuals have always appeared as real monsters in the moral world, as deformed and misshapen bodies are in the natural. The reason of all men, in proportion as it is enlightened and cleared of prejudices and prepossessions, not only acknowledges in general a distinction in our actions, but strongly approves all the branches of virtue, and as strongly condemns every degree of vice.

This distinction is further confirmed by the known tendency of the former to promote individual and general happiness, and the contrary tendency of its opposite. These respective effects of virtue and vice are sometimes indeed remote and distant. Hence the temptation to the thoughtless and inconsiderate to confound them. Hence their delusions

and mistakes concerning them. It is because men consider not the issues and final consequences of things, that they ever, in any instance, lose sight of the difference between good and evil. God has so constituted our nature and the frame of things around us, that the way of duty is universally the way to happiness. The accidents of this world, its wickedness, and the circumstances necessary to a state of trial and probation, may for a short season render it otherwise. But ultimately, piety, righteousness, and sobriety are found absolutely essential to human happiness. Having no respect to the conclusion of things, and regarding nothing but present gratification, wicked and unreasonable men would fain flatter themselves that there is no other good or evil, but what custom, the general opinion, and human laws have established. Yet it is certain that all reasonable laws are themselves founded upon this original, immutable, and eternal distinction. Should all the legislators on earth ordain that good should be evil or evil good, the decree would be as vain and absurd, as though they should ordain that darkness should be light, or light darkness, bitter sweet, or sweet bitter, pleasure pain, or pain pleasure.

Nay, we are not to consider this moral distinction as resulting even from the laws of God himself. When it is said in Scripture that the Judge of all the earth "will do right," the expression implies that there is a right and a wrong in things themselves, antecedent to any conceived law whatever;

and that all the divine laws are founded upon this distinction, and intended to enforce prior obligations, obligations necessarily resulting from the nature of moral beings and their relation to God and one another. When St. Paul exhorts us to “whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, virtuous, and praiseworthy,”—the implication is, that these and all other virtues are essentially different from their contrary vices, and that the distinction exists in the nature of the things themselves abstractedly considered from any law whatever, whether human or divine.

But sufficient, perhaps, has been said in proof of this distinction. It remains briefly to show

Fourthly, That God in the administration of his moral government over mankind will ultimately support it, and of course bring misery and ruin upon all who obstinately persist in disregarding it. This indeed is but an obvious inference from what has been already said. For if the moral character and perfections of the Supreme Being necessarily imply the eternal difference between good and evil; if with reference to this distinction he has created the universe, adapting the nature of man and the frame of things around him to moral purposes; if his will, as discoverable by reason, and as made known by revelation, with all its promises and threatenings, enforces virtue and prohibits vice,—there needs no farther proof to satisfy us, that in the conclusion he will, with his infinite power, support this distinction, and bring full and irresistible conviction of it to the

minds of all his rational offspring. At that period, the wo denounced in the text against those who call evil good and good evil, and persist in confounding these opposite natures, will be realized in all its terrors. The present advantages of which they boast, will then be infinitely overbalanced by disadvantages. In the end, their gain will be found an infinite, irreparable loss. For what shall it profit them, though they had gained the whole world, if the exchange prove the loss of their souls?

Let a practical sense of this truth, my hearers, have full possession of our hearts, and steadily regulate all our purposes and pursuits in life. In religion, let it be our care to regard nothing as essential which is not connected with real goodness. And be it remembered that the latter is not confined to any set of speculative opinions, or of outward forms, rites, and solemnities of worship. Upon these, therefore, the stress is not to be laid. However right they may be in themselves, still they are no certain criterion of real virtue. In judging of the latter, we are to attend, not to our passions or prejudices, or to the customs, maxims, or opinions of the world, but to the dictates of reason, and the representations given in Scripture. These are to be regarded as the standard of our actions. And while we build our hopes of salvation upon the merits of a Saviour, and the free grace of God through him, we are to consider nothing as solid evidence of our being the

subjects of this grace, but real piety, virtue, and moral goodness. By the steady, uniform practice of these, we shall lay a foundation for comfort and honour in life, and a well grounded hope in death.

SERMON IV.*

THE RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH SHOWN TO BE A
DUTY OF UNIVERSAL AND PERPETUAL OBLIGATION.

ADVERTISEMENT.

[While the author rejoices in the endeavours at this juncture exerted in different parts of the country to check the lamentable profanations of the *Lord's Day*, and offers his discourse in aid of such endeavours; he submits it to the consideration of his fellow-christians, whether it may not be prudent to limit the restraints of law to ordinary worldly occupations, teams, droves, parties of pleasure, and such other secular pursuits and amusements, as bear on the face of them a manifest desecration of the day, without extending said restraints to each solitary traveller who may have a just or plausible excuse. In numberless instances we are incompetent to judge one for another what things come under the denomination of necessity or mercy. Perhaps it is best in doubtful questions to leave our neighbours and brethren, each one to the decision of his own conscience.]

GENESIS ii. 2, 3.

On the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work, which God created and made.

IN these words we have the original institution of the sabbath, attended with circumstances of the utmost solemnity. The earth itself and all the other

* Preached when the Sabbath laws were revised by the General Court, and designed by the author to be published at that time.

creatures had been first produced, when man, for whose accommodation and use they were intended, appears the last and chief of all God's works in this lower creation. Of him alone it is said, that he was formed in the likeness, or after the image of his Maker. This resemblance to God could consist in nothing but his capacity for knowing and rationally serving the great Author of his being. As the offspring of God, raised above, and distinguished from the other creatures, by his intellectual and moral faculties; his chief happiness must, of course, result from his communion and intercourse with his Maker. True religion was from the beginning essential to his happiness, both in his individual and social capacity. As God intended his happiness, he created him under the obligations of religion, and, as a necessary means of religion, immediately ordained for him a sabbath. Our Saviour says explicitly, the "sabbath was made for man," that is, for the first man on his first creation, and through him, for all his descendants, who should, by the observance of it, become truly religious, and thereby ultimately happy. In this way to allure us to happiness, by alluring us to the means of happiness, it pleased our gracious Creator to set before us his own example for the sanctification of the sabbath. To Omnipotence, the creation of the world in one day or in one instant must have been as easy, and, for aught we can conceive, as eligible as the gradually continued operation through six successive days, had not our instruction been the

object. After narrating the works done on each of the six days, the history adds in the text, "and on the seventh day God ended," meaning, "had ended his work—and he rested;" not as though weary, "for the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary;" but he ceased from the work of creation, as having completed the model of his own infinite mind, and, from that day to this, has added to it no new species of animals, of vegetables, or of materials, not perhaps an atom of matter. This cessation from new productions is what we are to understand by his "resting on the seventh day from all his work." The word also imports his satisfaction in the review of what he had done, as being very good. "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it," that is, he separated and set it apart from the other days of the week, to be kept holy to himself—to be regarded as sacred to his immediate service; a holy festival, on which the mind of man should find satisfaction and joy in meditating on God as discovering himself in his works, praising him for his goodness, and holding communion with him in the exercises of devotion. For these purposes, and to be spent in employments similar to these, the seventh day was blessed and sanctified. That man might be induced thus to regard it by the example as well as the authority of the Legislator, God marked and signalized the day, by wholly ceasing from his creating work. In imitation of him, man is enjoined to rest from his usual worldly

occupations, and regard the day as belonging to God, a time appropriated to his worship, to render him the homage due from his rational, moral subjects.

On the very birthday of the world, this ordinance was passed, and the knowledge of it was probably among the first communications which Adam received from his Creator. But as he could not have understood what was meant by the sanctification of the seventh day, unless he had been previously acquainted with many other principles of religion, we must suppose that he was, on his first creation, at once furnished with his knowledge, either by inspiration or some other mode of instruction. If he was made upright in a moral sense, and his first actions were consonant to rectitude, the truths of natural religion in general must have been known to him. With the knowledge of God and of his relation to him as his creature, he must have been sensible of his obligations to love and praise, serve and obey the Being who had given him existence with all its attendant comforts. He must have concluded, that, by these things, he would attain to the highest dignity, excellence, and perfection of his nature. Experience would soon teach him, that a proper sense of these things could not be retained without frequent and close application of thought,—that, while providing for the subsistence of his body, and admitting those unavoidable cares and concerns attending such provision, he would be in constant danger of losing those views of God and devout

affections towards him, which are essential to habitual piety, unless he had stated seasons for religious duties. The appropriation of some portion of time for these duties, is the dictate of natural religion. The observation of a sabbath in general has its foundation in the reason of things, though what proportion of time ought to be thus appropriated, may be matter of positive appointment.

With the general knowledge of religion, Adam received this appointment, and was commanded to keep holy the seventh day, as time belonging to God and his worship. Every day indeed is God's, the night also is his; but after allowing man six days for his ordinary pursuits, he claims the seventh to be spent in an immediate attendance upon him, not merely for his pleasure, but for man's good and happiness. It was judged necessary for man even in his best, primeval state, while yet recent and innocent from the hands of his Maker. In order to his preservation in that state, and continued improvement as a rational, moral being, he was required to sanctify the sabbath. This precept, in the order of the history, precedes that which was afterwards made the test of his obedience in the terrestrial paradise. How much more important and necessary to man, must the institution now be, in order to his recovery from his present state of degeneracy and guilt.

It is indeed true, that after the first institution, the sabbath is not again explicitly mentioned in the history of the patriarchs. From this omission, some learned men, fond of viewing it as a mere Jewish rite, have inferred that the original institution was subsequent to the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, and the record of it in the text, proleptical. But surely "the silence of history with respect to a rite or custom, well known to have been instituted or adopted, is no argument against such continuance, provided the reason on which the institution was originally grounded, remains the same." After the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan, no mention is made of the circumcision of a child through the whole duration of the Jewish economy down to the birth of John the Baptist. Will any infer from this omission, that circumcision was discontinued during that period? And is it not equally unreasonable to suppose, in contradiction to the natural order of events, and the literal connexion of history recording them, that God left mankind destitute of so useful and even necessary an institution as the sabbath during the patriarchal age? Had he no church on earth? Was there no religion in the world for the space of more than two thousand years after its creation? Neither church nor religion could have been supported without sabbaths. The supposition of *their* being wanting through those early ages, is most arbitrary and extravagant. For what purpose, or with what propriety, has inspired history record-

ed the institution as commencing on the very day succeeding the creation?

If man was the chief and ultimate object of the Creator in the formation of the world; if to be subservient to him, the other creatures were evidently produced; if the tribute of praise for the whole was to be expected from him alone;—is it not absurd to suppose that he should have been left ignorant of any fixed season for the payment of this tribute, for discharging the duties of religion? Must he not also have been left equally ignorant of the whole history of the creation? Or will it be pretended, that God communicated to Adam the knowledge of what had been done on each of the six days, until he came to the seventh, and there stopped without a hint or intimation of the rest and sanctification of that day, notwithstanding the latter most naturally and obviously appears to have been the great aim of the gradual process of all the preceding days?

Certain it is, that Adam, on his first creation, was, in some way or other, furnished with a degree of knowledge to which few of his posterity can pretend. “He gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field. The Lord God brought them to Adam to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.” During the formation of Eve, he is said to have been in a deep sleep; yet he no sooner awaked, than he seems to have had a perfect knowledge of all that

had been done ; and instantly exclaimed, “ This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh ; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.” Other circumstances might be adduced in proof of his superior intelligence. Was he then supernaturally informed of these smaller concerns ; was he inspired with the knowledge of language, and with the knowledge of the nature of all creatures ; and yet left ignorant of the creation, and of the duty which he owed to the Creator ; ignorant of religion, and of the sabbath, the great instrument of religion ?

On his apostacy and expulsion from Eden, he was doomed to labour and toil ; to earn his bread in the sweat of his face ; henceforward many wants and avocations pressed upon him, taking up his time and attention, and leaving him no power to perform religious duties, but in a way consistent with his present hard lot in the world. Religious duties however were then enjoined, and he was encouraged to the observance of them by the hope of being, through a mediator, restored to the lost favour of his Maker. He received a form of religion, adapted to strengthen his faith and hope in the promised Saviour. Besides moral precepts, he was directed to consecrate places of worship, build altars, distinguish animals into clean and unclean, bring oblations and offer sacrifices to God. In short, a great part of the law afterward published by Moses, seems to have been, at sundry times and in divers manners, before

made known to the patriarchs. "Abraham," says God, "kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." By these several expressions, all the various branches of the Mosaic dispensation were afterward designated. There was, then, in the patriarchal age, a body of laws to direct the obedience, and a system of duties to guide the devotion of man. But in order to the performance of these duties, stated seasons were as necessary at first as they were afterward. "Such is the constitution of man, that he must have particular times set apart for particular services. If stated times for religious solemnities had not been enjoined, the consequence would have been that such solemnities would have been altogether neglected; for experience shows, that if mankind are left at liberty when and how often they should perform religious offices, these offices would not be performed at all. It is the observation of holy times that preserves the practice of holy services; and without the frequent and regular returns of hallowed days, man would quickly forget the duty which he owes to God, and in a short time no vestige of religion would be found in the world."

These consequences were distinctly foreseen by the all-wise Creator, and strongly guarded against in his very manner of rearing the fabric of nature; with the foundations of the world, he laid a solid and rational foundation for our consecrating to him and his service a seventh part of our time. As often as we review this ample creation around us, and reflect

that it was the work of six days, we are reminded of the duties implied in the sanctification of the seventh. The latter being claimed by Him who is the giver of all time, we must feel ourselves constrained by every motive of gratitude, duty, and interest, to consecrate it to his service.

Though, as we have already admitted, the sanctification of the seventh day by the patriarchs be not explicitly mentioned, yet much occurs in their history rendering it highly probable. In Gen. iv. 3, 4, we thus read ; “ In process of time, Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord : and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock.” The season of these oblations here called the “ process of time,” is, in the Hebrew, literally, “ at the end of days.” Of what days ? Undoubtedly on the last of those which make up the week. No interpretation can be more natural and obvious. As the septenary division of time was made by the Creator in his work of creation, so it was the first in use among men, and repeatedly occurs in the book of Genesis. At the end of seven days, week after week, Noah sends forth the dove out of the ark. After imposing Leah upon Jacob, Laban promises him Rachel, on condition of his “ fulfilling her week ;” it is added, “ Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week.” Not only in sacred, but in profane history, this distribution of time into weeks, is mentioned as generally prevailing among the most ancient nations, the Egyptians, Assyrians, Arabians, and Persians.

From the earlier ages, it passed down to the Greeks. Both Homer and Hesiod designate the seventh day as *sacred*. As this division of time could not have originated from any known law or phenomenon in nature, the only rational and satisfactory solution is, some traditionary fragment of the "six days' creation, and seventh-day rest."

That the Israelites in Egypt were not unacquainted with the distinction in favour of the seventh day, may be fairly, and, I think, conclusively inferred from the incidental manner in which the sabbath is first mentioned in the sixteenth chapter of Exodus. Among the directions there given concerning the miraculous *manna*, the sabbath is mentioned as an institution long since established, and well known to the people. The Lord said unto Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, and on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they shall bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily." If the seventh-day sabbath had not been previously known to Moses, how could he have understood this order for gathering twice as much on the sixth day." No explanation was added, yet neither he nor the people appear to have been at any loss. They went out and "gathered manna every morning" successively, until they came to the sixth morning, when they "gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man; and all the rulers of the congregation came and told

Moses.” Though the rulers well knew that this double quantity had been collected for their supply over the sabbath, yet as they also knew that this kind of bread, when kept over night, had constantly corrupted, they apprehended a serious difficulty, which induced them to state the case to Moses. After his solution, it is added, “ And they laid it up until the morning, as Moses bade ; and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein,” as there had been before. Had this been the first time of the Israelites keeping the sabbath, had the institution been now *new* to them, “ it must have been enjoined in a positive and particular manner, and the nature of it must have been laid open and explained, otherwise the term would have conveyed no meaning.” But nothing can be plainer from this whole chapter, than that they had already been accustomed, at least as many of them as made any pretensions to piety, to regard this seventh day as *sacred*. In order to preserve it sacred, the Lord regulates the falling of the manna in conformity to its known and established law ; which is here spoken of as familiar to the people, and undoubtedly had been so to all the truly religious, from its first institution the day after the creation. Of course, the mention of it again during that period of sacred history, was as unnecessary as that of any other common and generally received principle of religion.

The style in which the institution was afterward renewed at the giving of the law on mount Sinai,

evidently implies that it was but the repetition of a prior command, understood and generally known from the beginning. No other command in the decalogue begins, as does the fourth, with the word "remember," (implying a reproof of former carelessness and inattention, and a strong caution against them for the future), "remember the sabbath day to keep it holy." Let that day, as heretofore, be still regarded as sacred to religion; and for the reason at first assigned, because "that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is;" then follow the very words used at the finishing of the creation, "and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord," then, at that time, "blessed the seventh day and hallowed it." In what language could there have been a more manifest reference to the original appointment? The reason assigned for it on both occasions is not peculiar to the Israelites, but appropriated to all men, as all are equally concerned in commemorating the works of creation, and in adoring the Almighty Creator.

We must bear in mind that the precepts of the decalogue were pronounced by God himself with the utmost majesty in the ears of all the people. "These words," says Moses, meaning the ten commandments, "the Lord spake unto all your assembly, in the mount, out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice; and he added no more: and he wrote them in

two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me." These tables, thus inscribed, were, by divine order, deposited in the ark of the covenant; and are themselves called "the covenant," and "the tables of testimony." Do not these circumstances mark them as comprehensive and important above the other branches of the Mosaic dispensation? When we consider them as first spoken, then written by God, —written, too, on tables of stone, purposely to denote their perpetual duration, and kept in the appointed symbol of the divine presence; are we not constrained to believe, that, if any of the divine requisitions are of eternal and immutable obligation, those of the decalogue are of that number?

It is certain that these are exclusively intended by the term *law*, as it is often used in the New Testament, particularly by St. Stephen, Acts vii. 53; "Who have received the *law* by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." Some suppose that there may be a reference to them in Matth. xxii. 40; "On these two commandments," those of loving God and our neighbour, "hang all the law and the prophets." Undoubtedly they are included in this declaration of our Saviour, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

If we had not been thus cautioned against too hastily concluding ourselves released from the obligation of any of the ten commands, our own reason might have taught us that, while God is *one*, no

others ought to share in his worship ; while he is a spirit, he ought to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, to the exclusion of all corporeal images and representations ; while he possesses all possible perfection, our whole intercourse with him, and all our thoughts of him, and discourse about him, ought to be attended with the most profound awe and reverence. While we are entangled in the affairs of the present life, this knowledge of him, and these affections towards him, cannot have place in our minds. They will be neither cherished nor preserved without stated seasons for his worship ; and, of course, the fourth command is equally reasonable, important, and necessary, as any other in the decalogue.

In repeating this command, Deut. v. Moses does indeed assign a reason for it different from that in the original institution. After mentioning its rest as extending to servants and labouring cattle, he adds, " that thy man-servant and thy maid-servant may rest, as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt ; and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand, and by a stretched-out arm ; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day." From these words, some have inferred that the fourth command was given solely to establish a memorial of the redemption from Egypt, and was binding upon the Israelites alone ; but they might as conclusively infer, that the decalogue in general is

binding upon them alone ; for it is prefaced with the same reason ; “ I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.” The truth is, that every renewed instance of the divine goodness in our favour, especially every great and signal instance, increases our obligations to obedience, and is properly urged as a reason by which we ought to be influenced. Nearly all the commands and exhortations addressed to the Israelites, are enforced by the consideration of the great things which God had done for them in their emancipation from Egypt. How often is it said to them, “ Thou shalt not oppress a stranger ; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Their having been strangers is here mentioned, not as the original ground of the law against oppression, but as a special consideration which ought to have weight with the Israelites above all people, in restraining them from inflicting the misery which themselves had so severely felt. The passage cited from Deuteronomy ought to be explained on the same principle. Moses does not *then* give the original reason for the sanctification of the sabbath, but a special reason why the Israelites should allow their servants to rest and be refreshed on that day. The more powerfully to persuade them to this indulgence, they are reminded of their own hard condition, while in a state of slavery, when, no day of rest being permitted, they were urged on to their burdens, day after day without intermission. God, having now freed

them, and raised some of them to the condition of masters, enjoins it upon them not to imitate the rigour of their former Egyptian oppressors, but to be lenient and merciful in the treatment of their slaves, allowing them a day of rest as often as they enjoyed it themselves. Upon the whole, this text, when rightly understood, is so far from making the redemption from Egypt the original ground of the fourth command, and limiting its obligation to the Jews, that it mentions that redemption with no other view but as a special motive to a better and more general observance of the command.

In like manner and in the same sense, the Gospel redemption, prefigured by that of Israel from Egypt, has increased the obligation on Christians to obey the same command: so far from abolishing the sabbath, it has rendered the keeping of it holy to God, unspeakably more important, if possible, than it was of old. Such, however, are the misconceptions of men, that some have affected to believe that, as neither Christ nor his Apostles have given any explicit commands respecting the sanctification of a sabbath or the appropriating of any particular day to the duties of religion, Christians are left wholly at liberty on the subject; nay, they pretend that we are cautioned against submitting to any infringement of this our liberty, by suffering the observation of any particular day to be imposed upon us as more holy than other days. St. Paul is supposed thus to caution us when he says, "let no

man judge you in respect of an holy day or of the new moon, or of the sabbath." Our answer to all this is, that though Christians are excused from observing the Jewish holy days, including even the Saturday sabbath; yet nothing can be more inconsistent with the whole tenor of the Gospel, than the supposition of their being exempted from the obligations of the fourth command, and left without any fixed season for the duties of religion. Such a season is implied in each and all the precepts requiring those duties. The whole frame of the christian church, whatever pertains to its instruction and government, the ministration of gospel ordinances, and the performance of gospel duties, are inseparably connected with stated seasons,—a day regularly returning, set apart for those purposes.

If it be asked, Why was this day not more explicitly designated? if the ancient season for religious solemnities were changed, why was not the change so mentioned as to preclude all doubt? this will appear less strange, perhaps, when it is considered that, as Christ himself was a subject of the Mosaic economy, and through his whole life preserved an exact conformity to all its institutions; so his disciples had the utmost reverence for them, and on their being commissioned as Apostles, were still slow of apprehension with respect to the abolition of those forms of worship which had been peculiar to the Jews, and a wall of partition between them and the Gentiles. Their first converts too were

Jews, who did not renounce their *old* religion when they embraced the *new*. They believed themselves still bound to keep the law of Moses, and many of them thought it necessary that this law should also be kept by the converted Gentiles. Their zeal in propagating this opinion among the churches of the Gentiles continued unabated through the course of many years, and, in divers places, occasioned no small controversy. The Apostles themselves judged it prudent, at first, to be tender and forbearing in their opposition to these Jewish prejudices. Though they did not suffer circumcision and the heavier part of the ceremonial law to be imposed on the Gentiles; yet, "as meats offered to idols, blood and things strangled," were held in the utmost abhorrence by the Jews, in condescension to them, and to preserve communion between them and the Gentiles, the abstaining from those things was, in a general assembly of the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem, recommended to the believing Gentiles. On the same principle, and lest the success of the Gospel among their own nation, should be hindered by a contrary behaviour, the Apostles themselves continued to observe the law of Moses in various particulars, which they knew to be no longer obligatory.

Under such circumstances, while the distinction between the old and new dispensation, the shadowy and typical nature of the former, and its subserviency to the latter, were as yet so imperfectly discerned; is it not conceivable that the Apostles might think

that posterity would be sufficiently directed by *their* example, and by the example of the churches which they had formed, in keeping the first day of the week, without their formally instituting it, or giving to this new day, the name of *sabbath*, which, at that time, might have been ill received in conjunction with the days already observed, or ill understood, and liable to be confounded with the sabbath which was now to sink into disuse? Might they not leave it to time, and the increasing knowledge of the christian system, to discover the reason for the change, and to transfer, as far as they were of a moral nature, the well known obligations of the seventh, to the first day sabbath?

Both testaments, the old and new complete, being now in our hands, by comparing them, may not *we* discern a probable and weighty reason for the change? The work of redemption is often mentioned in Scripture, as surpassing all God's other works, as a thorough renovation of the moral, and ultimately of the natural world,—in short, as a new creation. With reference to it, God says by the Evangelical Prophet, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind." In commemoration of the former, the seventh-day sabbath was ordained; but when Christ rose from the dead, he *rested*, as God did before, from that work which is the foundation of the new heavens and earth. If "the morning stars sang together," when they beheld the

frame of material nature rising, with a new and increasing rapture, they shouted "Glory to God in the highest," when they beheld the "chief cornerstone" of the new creation brought forth. By the latter is "made known to principalities and powers the manifold wisdom of God." It contains things "into which the angels desire to look." The first heavens and earth, being defaced by the sin of man, are doomed to perish. They are growing old, going to decay, and will at length pass away; while the new heavens and earth are continually rising in grandeur and glory, and when completed will endure forever. "Be glad," therefore, says God, "and rejoice forever in that which I create." Was not this a prediction of their future commemoration? Does it not furnish a just reason for dropping the seventh, and celebrating the first day sabbath? That a sabbath would be regularly observed under this new dispensation, is expressly foretold in the subsequent chapter. "The new heavens and new earth which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord. And it shall come to pass that from one sabbath to another shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord." Isaiah lxvi. 22, 23. That this gospel sabbath would be the day of Christ's resurrection, seems to be intimated in Psalm cxviii. 22, 23, 24, as then his exaltation to be the "head-stone of the corner," would commence, through the "marvellous" power of God, he being "declared to be the son of God with power, by the

resurrection from the dead”—an event making this day peculiarly the Lord’s, and stamping upon it his image and superscription. “This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

By the coming of Christ and publication of the gospel, what was political in the law of Moses, or intended as a hedge around the Jews, separating them from the other nations, was abolished; what was merely ceremonial and typical, was fulfilled; and what was moral and perpetually obligatory, was illustrated and enforced by more weighty and awful sanctions, better promises, and more alarming threatenings. No small part of our Saviour’s discourses consists in commenting upon, explaining, and vindicating the precepts of the decalogue from the misconstructions of the Jewish doctors. Upon none of those precepts did he more frequently enlarge, than upon that which enjoins the sanctification of the sabbath. As the Scribes and Pharisees, by their interpretations and traditions, had rendered void several of the other commands; so they mistook or perverted the design of the fourth. Under the influence of superstitious hypocrisy, which always dwells with punctilious exactness on forms and ceremonies, they lost sight of the original meaning of its rest and sanctification; and substituted in their place, a kind of physical rest, a torpid inactivity. The original Hebrew word had never such a signification. While it marks, as used in the text, the

ceasing from such works as had been prosecuted on the six preceding days ; its principal force consists in denoting the fulness and perfection of the things made, and the satisfaction and complacency of the divine mind in the review of these its works.

It was intended that something of a similar complacency in God, and in the display of his perfections, should take place in our minds by our resting upon and sanctifying this day. Our ordinary cares and pursuits were to cease, that we might give ourselves to religious contemplations, and the expressions of homage to the Creator for our being, and for the well furnished world in which we are placed. But, as God did not rest from the care of his works on the seventh day, from preserving, governing, and providing for them ; so neither did he intend or require that we should rest on that day from any thing necessary to the preservation of our lives, healths, or substance. Whenever the labours of the preceding week would be in danger of being lost without our continued exertions on the sabbath, we are authorized by his example to make those exertions, so far as to prevent any special detriment. Nor was it his intention to require any thing like the Jewish indolence. As he, in his providence, works all things upon the sabbath, as well as on other days, rendering them subservient to his glory and the general good of his creation ; so those works by us which have this intention and tendency, are not unsuitable to the sabbath. Nay, the best possible

method of keeping the day, is by filling it up with exercises of piety and works of charity.

It was thus that our Saviour, both by precept and example, hath taught us to keep holy the sabbath day. As he omitted no opportunity of attending public worship, it being his invariable "custom to enter the synagogue every sabbath;" so he never declined any office of compassion, either to the souls or to the bodies of men on that day. When for the latter his enemies censured him, he answered, "it is lawful to do well on the sabbath." When they insisted that his works were violations of its sacred rest, he declared that, so far from it, they were but imitations of what God himself did every sabbath. "My father worketh hitherto, and I work." When they accused his disciples for plucking and rubbing the ears of corn, to satisfy their hunger, on the sabbath, he replied, that what was thus necessary, could not be unlawful; for moral obligation superseded positive institution; "God would have mercy rather than sacrifice." To convince them that the sanctification of the day consists, not merely in resting from work, but in performing such works as God has enjoined; he reminded them of the servile and laborious operations performed by "the priests in the temple," when slaughtering, flaying, cutting up, and burning upon the altar, the beasts offered in sacrifice every sabbath, the law requiring a number on that day double to that of other days. Further to correct their false ideas of this day, and

teach them that human happiness is not to be hazarded by its pretended observance, he assured them that it was not an arbitrary appointment, nor intended merely as a test of man's obedience, like the forbidden tree in Eden; but for his benefit, to subserve together with the refreshment of his body, the improvement of his mind. "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath."

Keeping in view what has been now offered, can it be supposed that our Saviour would have taken such pains in elucidating the sabbath, and in correcting the prevailing errors concerning it, if the period had been at hand for its final abolition? Or can we suppose that the evangelists would have been so particular in recording his remarks upon the subject, if at the time they knew that there was no longer a sabbath? To what purpose are those long discourses containing, in the whole through all the gospels, matter equal to several chapters—to what purpose are they, if under the New Testament all days are alike? What instruction or advantage can Christians derive from the perusal of them? Why did our Saviour say, "the sabbath was made for man," words literally implying, *all men*, and agreeing to all men? Why too is it mentioned as a privilege, a general privilege? Why is it thus mentioned at the very time when this privilege is to be withdrawn, and men are to enjoy it no longer? Would it not have been more natural, and far more consonant to truth, for him to have said, "the sabbath

was made for the Jews during their state of bondage to the ceremonial law, as a part of that yoke which God in his wrath put upon their stiff necks; but from which I am now come to set them free?" However others may be impressed by these considerations, to my reason and conscience they bring a conviction of the continued obligations of the fourth command respecting the sanctification of the seventh part of time, as full and unwavering as though that command had been expressly repeated by our Saviour, as one of his own injunctions. Though no imaginable reason can be assigned for lessening that proportion of time originally reserved for the worship of the great Author of all time, yet a probable reason for the change of the sacred day from the last to the first day of the week, has been already suggested. The positive proof of this change may now be briefly stated.

As constituted Head over all things to the church, the authority of Christ to change times and seasons will not be denied. An intimation of his purpose to show his authority in the approaching change of the sabbath, seems to have been given to the Jews in that saying of his, "the son of man is lord even of the sabbath day." There is a force and meaning in these words, worthy of the high character of the speaker, when understood as alluding to that day which would hereafter be styled the Lord's. It is possible, if not highly probable, that this his meaning was explicitly announced to

his disciples on the very day of his resurrection. All four of the Evangelists are particular and express in their testimony that this was "the first day of the week." Why should such apparent stress be laid on this circumstance of day, if no matter of consequence was intended? His resurrection was the great event, but whether this took place on the first or any other day of the week, was in itself, perhaps, of no great moment, unless it were intended that the day should be thereby marked and signally distinguished from the other days of the week. "Then the same day at evening, being *the first day of the week*, when the doors were shut where the disciples had assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst." John xx. 19. At this interview he made many important communications to the disciples; and that, among others, he now directed them for the future, to assemble on this day, is rendered probable by their being again actually assembled and his showing himself to them the second time on that day week, as in the 26th verse. It is hardly conceivable that this second meeting should have been accidental; it has evidently the appearance of appointment. After his ascension, the disciples were again "assembled in one place, on the day of Pentecost," universally acknowledged to have been the first day of the week, when they received that miraculous effusion of the Holy Ghost, which qualified them for their mission to convert all nations.

That henceforward it was the custom of all christian societies wherever formed, to hold their religious assemblies on the first day of the week, appears from all history, both sacred and profane. We read in Acts xx. 7, that at Troas, "*upon the first day of the week*, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them." He had come there on what we call Monday, and tarried seven days, apparently for no other purpose but for the opportunity of seeing the brethren assembled, and joining with them in the holy duties to which the first day of the week was now universally understood to be set apart. Having had this interview, he was "ready to depart on the morrow." From 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2, it appears that the churches, both in Galatia and at Corinth, were directed to make their pecuniary collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem, on every "first day of the week," clearly implying that they were accustomed to hold their religious assemblies on that day. At the time when St. John wrote the Apocalypse, this day was generally known, and distinguished by the name of Lord's day. Rev. i. 10. "I was in the spirit *on the Lord's day*." They who are predetermined not to find any day sacred to religion, may affect not to know what day is here meant; but this title by St. John, as the similar one for the eucharist by St. Paul, sufficiently marks the appropriation of the day to the service of our Redeemer; and implies that the whole christian world at that time were

acquainted both with the day and with this its appropriation.

In all questions not explicitly determined by Scripture, the example of Christ, of his Apostles, or of the church in the Apostolic age, has been always deemed a sufficient directory for Christians, carrying with it an authority equivalent to an express command. If, too, any usage or practice of the first Christians but occasionally mentioned in Scripture, appear from the memoirs of the times immediately succeeding the age of the Apostles, to have been then universally observed in the church,—this has been always thought sufficient to establish the authority of such usage or practice. Upon this principle, the testimonies of Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth, Clemens Alexandrinus, Origen, Cyprian, &c. must be decisive in ascertaining what day St. John called the Lord's, and its appropriation to his service.

To the epistles, apologies, and other writings of those fathers, and also the well known letter of Pliny to Trajan, giving an account of the Christians in his province, *they* may have recourse, who wish for farther satisfaction on this subject. After making quotations from all the above named authors and divers others, Mr. Baxter thus concludes; “If scripture history, interpreted and seconded by fullest practice and history of all the churches of Christ, and by the consent of heathens and heretics, and not contradicted by any sect in the world, be to be

believed, then we must say, that the Lord's day was commonly kept by Christians in and from the Apostles' times." As there was no general council in that early age to introduce and establish such a custom, it could have had no other origin but the authority of the Apostles, uniformly enjoining it on their proselytes in every country, where they succeeded in planting churches.

Of the foregoing reasoning, this is the sum. On the formation of the world, and of man, its principal inhabitant, from him God required the duties of religion and set apart a season for the performance of them. As the author of all time, and of all the divisions of time; after having "made great lights, the sun to rule the day, the moon and stars to rule the night;" after having thus set the wheels of time in motion, and marked its divisions; leaving six parts to the use of man, he reserved the seventh sacred to himself. In this reserve, however, he aimed at the happiness of man, who, as possessing a rational, moral nature, cannot be happy without the knowledge and love of his Maker. A season for acquiring and cherishing these essentials of religion, was necessary for him while in a state of innocence, and much more so after his apostacy. Among the means prescribed for his recovery, the sanctification of the sabbath is of the first importance. It fills up the sum of moral duties enjoined in the first table of the law, and is a prerequisite indispensably necessary to the right discharge of them all.

They who affect to consider it is a typical institution, have never been able to point out the thing typified by it. The reason assigned for it at first, remains the same through every age. It applies in common to all men, to us upon whom the ends of the world are come, as fully as to the Jews of old, or to the patriarchs who preceded the Jews. Our Saviour in announcing that "it was made for man," has given it a sanction which cannot cease but with the existence of men. The change of the day from the last to the first of the week in honour of Him, and of that new creation of which he is the author, is so far from lessening, that it rather implies a double obligation to keep it holy. That it was so kept by the Apostles and their converts, we have the testimony of Scripture. Its continued observance by their successors through the three first centuries, is attested by Heathen as well as Christian writers in those ages. "This pious custom," says Mosheim in his Ecclesiastical History, "was founded upon the express appointment of the Apostles, and was universally observed throughout all the christian churches." In the review of this mass of evidence, can we doubt of our obligations to sanctify the Lord's day, not only by a suspension of our secular cares and pursuits, but by conscientiously attending on those exercises of private and public devotion which the Gospel requires?

The allowed neglect of these duties by any sincere Christian, is utterly inconceivable. The power

of godliness in his heart, must prompt him to make conscience of them, and take pleasure in them. To him the sabbath brings a welcome release from the cares and labours of this vain world, and an opportunity for exercises and employments more suitable to the *relish* of his spiritual mind, and from which he derives a satisfaction and joy far superior to their's, whose corn and wine are increased. As the return of these sacred seasons is intended to prepare him for heaven, so they occasionally afford him a delightful foretaste of that good land. When duly observed, they cannot fail to improve his acquaintance with God and divine things, strengthening his faith, brightening his hope, increasing his holiness, and, by a constant growth in grace, ripening him for the world of glory. The best Christians have always been the most strict observers of the sabbath, have rejoiced in keeping holy time, and expressed their gratitude to God for so gracious an institution. The prevailing desires of their hearts are breathed forth in the language of the Psalmist, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord; I love the habitation of thy house; a day in thy courts is better than a thousand."

Carnal, worldly minds, as they have no idea of pleasure in devotional exercises, may esteem the keeping holy to God a seventh part of their time, a burden heavy and oppressive, more irksome to their feelings, than all the toil of the six working days. But if a sabbath of a few hours here on earth be

such a weariness to them, ought they not to consider how they will be able to endure an everlasting sabbath in heaven? Or, rather, ought they not seriously to inquire, whether they have any scriptural ground to hope for admission into that holy place. Will any be received *there* without the requisite qualifications? The sabbath is ordained as a special season for acquiring those qualifications, by attending upon, and using the prescribed means of grace. It is an acceptable time, a day of salvation. Ought it not to be most diligently and earnestly improved, especially by those whose title remains still to be obtained? To us all our Saviour says, "strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many will seek to enter," but, through want of sufficient exertion, "will not be able;" and he adds, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." When, if not on the sabbath, is this force to be exerted?

The services of the sabbath are a great and essential part of the prescribed means of salvation. In the neglect of them there is no room for hope. The conversion of sinners must commence in their earnest attention to the duties of holy time. Till they can be persuaded to "remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy;" all their days will be spent, if not in actual sin, yet unquestionably in a state of estrangement from that holiness, without which no man can see the Lord. If we would obtain his favour, we are directed to wait at his gates, and

watch at the posts of his door. His call to us is, "Turn ye at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you." In order to our receiving this promised blessing, we must turn to the observance of his institutions, especially of his sabbaths. May we all hasten to place ourselves in this way of becoming the happy subjects of his sanctifying spirit and grace!

SERMON V.

FUTURE STATE.

LUKE xvi. 27—31.

Then he said, I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house :

For I have five brethren : that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham ; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

INFORMATION of the greatest moment to us as probationers for eternity, is contained in the foregoing part of this parable, which assures us of an immutable and everlasting state of rewards and punishments after this life. In what has been now read, it seems to have been the design of our Saviour to

quiet our minds upon a subject, about which we naturally form many anxious inquiries. When our friends are separated from us, and removed to a distant, unknown country, with what solicitude do we wish for information concerning that country, and their situation in it. This solicitude will be greatly heightened, if we ourselves are soon to follow them into that unexplored region. In his word, it has pleased our merciful Judge to give us all the information concerning the other world which his wisdom has judged proper, and perhaps as much as we at present are capable of receiving. But still, who of us would not think it an inestimable privilege, and a great confirmation of his faith, if he might be permitted to see and converse with one of his deceased friends, and hear from him a relation of what had befallen him after death,—how he had passed through that change, and what he had seen and experienced in the world of spirits? Are we not inclined to think it a hard case, that no such intercourse is indulged,—that the secrets of the grave remain enveloped in impenetrable darkness, and that all the living are kept in such profound ignorance of the destinies of those who have passed the vale of death? Undoubtedly the dialogue between Abraham and one his lost descendants, is intended to reconcile us to this allotment of Providence, and induce us to rest satisfied with those discoveries which are contained in the Scriptures.

Among those who are destitute of all the principles of piety towards God, many retain the affections of nature towards their kindred. The adherence of these affections to the soul after its separation from the body, is supposed in the parable, and their influence prompts the request here made. Finding all application to obtain relief for himself to be vain, the rich man is here represented as expressing a concern for his brethren, still living on earth and in possession of that wealth which was lately enjoyed by him; lest by the abuse of it, and by following his thoughtless course, they might come to the same fatal end. He therefore proposes, what we are all ready to imagine must prove an irresistible mean of conviction and reformation, the mission to them of a monitor from the dead. In the reply of Abraham, it is affirmed that all just ground or reason for such a mission, has been superseded by what God himself has told them in the writings of Moses and the Prophets. With these writings, however, the rich man himself had been always favoured, and as they had failed of any effectual influence upon him, he supposed that they might also fail with respect to his brethren; and upon this ground repeats his request as a measure that would be more efficacious; "nay, father Abraham; but if one go to them from the dead, they will repent." They cannot withstand so awful a messenger, nor disregard his warnings. But Abraham puts an end to the discourse with this peremptory assertion, "If they hear not Moses and

the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." By putting this language in the mouth of Abraham, our Saviour gives it as his own judgment upon the case.

We are not perhaps to understand him as denying the possibility, or even the probability, that a man who has hitherto been but little influenced by the Scriptures, might be greatly affected by the apparition of one of his old acquaintance from the other world. Such an interview might give a new turn to his thoughts and reflections. His lusts and passions might at first be greatly checked by the surprise, awe, and warning of such a monitor. He might be excited to consideration, and should the influence of divine grace accompany this extraordinary event, it might prove effectual for his amendment. But the thing asserted is, that such a method as a general mean of conversion, would possess no advantage above those means already used, and that the generality of those men who persist in disregarding the warnings in Scripture, would not be reclaimed, though one should come to them from the dead.

At the express desire of his professing people, it was long since settled, that God should speak to them, not by ministers from the invisible world, nor yet by his own immediate voice from heaven. The Israelites once heard this at Sinai, but were so terrified, that they entreated to be excused from hearing it any more, and that it would please God to

communicate his will to them in a gentler way, through the mediation of men like themselves, through Moses and others whom he might commission for the purpose. From such messengers they could hear his commands with that presence of mind, which is necessary to a right perception of the things enjoined. Accordingly the whole subsequent system of divine revelation has had this mode of communication. The only question with *us* can be, whether those from whom it has been received had a divine commission. We can think of no other infallible proofs of this, but the gifts of prophecy and miracles. With such testimonials, Moses and the Prophets were abundantly furnished, and, being thus authorized, they spake and wrote. In the same manner, attended with a greater display of miracles, and of the spirit of prophecy, was the Gospel introduced by Christ and his Apostles. The canon of Scripture being thus completed, and the whole will of God committed to faithful records, and in this manner handed down from generation to generation; miracles and supernatural gifts have ceased, as being no longer necessary. For the same reason, there is no occasion for apparitions or messengers from the dead. The counsels of God, so far as it concerns us to know them, being already revealed, nothing remains for any extraordinary messenger to effect. If new doctrines different from those already received, should be taught, they are to be rejected, though the teacher should be an angel from heaven.

It is admitted that the awe and terror of an apparition, might at first command greater attention than is usually paid to the instructions in Scripture; but after the novelty should be over, and admonitions in this way should become frequent and common, there is, perhaps, no reason to suppose that they would be more successful than those already given. If we would wish them to be rare and singular instances, to whom should they be granted? Does it not seem improper and incongruous that so extraordinary a privilege should be extended to the most incorrigible offenders, and withheld from those who would be likely to make a better use of so signal a favour? But on the supposition, that now and then, in the different ages of the church, this extraordinary method should be used with an individual, what may we reasonably conclude would be the effect? At first, it might nearly frighten him out of his wits, but whether in the event it would frighten him out of his sins, may be doubted. After the consternation should be over, he would begin to query whether what had befallen him, might not be the work of imagination,—some impression upon his nerves, the delusion of fancy, or a temporary frenzy. It would tend to confirm him in this opinion, that the like had not happened to others, as well as to himself. While nature is thus recovering from its fright, sin may recover its strength, and the result may be an increased hardness of heart. In like manner, we often see men departing from those

resolutions of amendment which they occasionally form under circumstances of awakening and alarm, during a fit of sickness, or on the death of a near relation.

What can be more solemn and affecting, than the last adieu of a dying friend? If he has led an irreligious life, and is sensible of his situation in his final sickness; the discourse of a man who is thus going to the dead, is nearly as impressive as any which we could hear from one just come from thence. His expressions of remorse and anguish for the folly and guilt of his past life, mispense of time, and neglect of the means and seasons of grace; his earnest prayers to be spared a little longer, and his solemn declaration of the different manner in which he would live, if it would please God to grant his request; his agony at the idea of what must be his doom, should he now die in his sins; his earnest charges to his family and friends to avoid those evil courses, the reflection upon which is now the wormwood and gall of his soul, filling it with the most direful apprehensions, and a dreadful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation;—to surviving spectators and friends, all these things are greatly affecting, and rarely fail to produce in them, for a time, an uncommon degree of seriousness and religious concern. But the reformation thus produced, often proves like “the morning cloud or early dew.” Such impressions soon wear off, and the resolutions formed under them are forgotten.

They who have seen such spectacles, and heard such discourses, by degrees recover their former spirits and return to their old habits. It is but seldom that their future lives show any permanent and lasting effect to have been produced. Nay, if the sinful creature himself, who was the subject of such conviction and terror, and made such vows and promises during his sickness, or while in a situation of apprehended danger; should at length recover from his sickness, or escape from the danger,—how common is it even for *him* to forget all his religious purposes! Brought back again into the world, and returning to his old pursuits or amusements, he turns out to be the same character that he had been before, as bad, perhaps worse than ever. Losses, bereavements, sicknesses, dangers, and all the adversities of life, are so many awakening calls of Providence to repentance and reformation. If to these should be added apparitions and warnings from the dead, the latter would partake of the same general nature with those other warnings given us already, and when the repetition of them should render them as common as it is to see men die, and hear their dying speeches, their effect upon the generality would probably be much the same.

If it should be said that one coming from the dead, would settle the great question with respect to the reality of a future state, and do away all doubt upon this most interesting subject; it ought to be considered whether such a witness would be more

credible and more worthy of our confidence, than the proofs already set before us in the Scriptures. Should you be indulged with an interview with one of your old acquaintance from among the dead, how could you be certain of the truth of what he might tell you? We are often deceived by the accounts given by living men, and how can we know that death renders them incapable of falsehood, or of passing an imposition upon us? Besides, are we certain that there are no beings belonging to the other world, who might assume the shape and voice of our dead friend, on purpose to deceive us? After the spectre had vanished, might not doubts and queries of this sort rise in your mind, and weaken the force of all that you had heard?

It is certain that no creature, whether human or angelic, whether pertaining to the visible or invisible world, can give us the least information about futurity, unless commissioned by the Supreme Being. How can we know that an apparition speaks by virtue of such a commission? The revelation contained in the Scriptures, approves itself to our reason, is adapted to general use, applies itself to the circumstances of the whole human race, through their successive generations, and was at first introduced by manifold signs and wonders, as so many unquestionable attestations of its being from God. If a man disregard this standing revelation, would he give more credit to the supposed or real vision of a ghost? The latter produces no proofs of a mission from God.

It is not supposed that he works miracles. He makes a private communication to an individual, and disappears. The whole transaction is involved in mystery. We know not whence he came nor whither he went, nor can we be certain of the design of his appearance. Would a revelation communicated in this way be comparably so worthy of God, or so deserving of our confidence, as is that contained in the Scriptures ?

It may indeed be urged, that an apparition would be in itself a miracle, and the sight of this would be more satisfactory than the report of miracles, said by the writers of Scripture to have been wrought ages ago. But it must be remembered that the man who sees, or only thinks that he sees, an apparition, is inevitably thrown into such a degree of consternation, as renders him ill qualified to judge of the report of his own senses. These often deceive us, and almost always when we are in a fright. But admitting that a man might be able to command himself upon such an occasion, would the sight of a vanishing ghost be a better or more rational ground for religious belief, than the holy Scriptures, handed down to us as they are, with so many circumstances of credibility ? After maturely weighing all their internal and external proofs, strengthened and supported as they are by the general history of the world, is it conceivable that the man who rejects this evidence, would be converted by the sight of an apparition ? If the latter should frighten him into

a confession of faith, it surely could not be in itself a more rational ground of conviction. To all unbiassed spectators he must appear as yielding to an inferior and more questionable evidence, after rejecting the greater, more solid, and substantial. He would not believe that God has spoken to the world in general by Moses and the Prophets, by Christ and the Apostles; and yet believes him to have spoken privately to his own person by a ghost. He doubts of the inspiration of the former, notwithstanding the continued series of miracles by which it is attested, through a long course of ages, from the mission of Moses down to that of the Apostles; and yet believes the inspiration of his favourite ghost, without any proofs or credentials whatever. These observations show the unreasonableness and absurdity of wishing for messengers from the dead to convince those who are not convinced by the Holy Scriptures. They justify the assertion in the text, that they "who hear not Moses and the Prophets, would not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." They who can bring themselves to suspect the Scriptures to be a forgery, would find less difficulty in persuading themselves to believe the sayings of an apparition to be a delusion.

The truth is, that since God has given us a standing revelation of his will, attended with such circumstances of credibility, as ought to satisfy our reason, it becomes us cordially to receive and acquiesce in this, as a sufficient guide both for our faith

and practice. We have no warrant to ask for any other or new revelation, nor for any extraordinary signs to confirm our faith in this. When circumstances are such, that, if we be impartial and unprejudiced, we may receive abundant satisfaction in an ordinary way, by the right use of our faculties, and of those helps and advantages which are placed within our reach, it looks like a tempting of God, in such a case, to call for supernatural proofs. Nor may we suppose that so perverse a curiosity will be indulged.

Atheistical minds affect to doubt whether there be a God or a superintending providence. Observing the uniform course of nature, they may call for some supernatural sign to convince them that there is a God, and that the world is the object of his care. But is it reasonable to suppose or imagine, that in condescension to such perverse spirits, to convince and satisfy *them* of his being and universal government, God will change the course of nature, suspend or alter any of his laws; while by the standing testimonials of his power, wisdom, and goodness throughout the creation, he satisfies all reasonable minds of his being and perfections; and has never left himself without witnesses in the vicissitudes of day and night, the rotation of the seasons, rain from heaven, and those fruits from the earth which fill the hearts of men with food and gladness? These things would be accounted miracles, at which we should all be astonished, were they not so com-

mon and familiar. On this account, however, their evidence for God in the eye of reason, is not the less full, strong, and demonstrative. While his eternal power and godhead are thus clearly seen and understood, from the things which he has made, and from his continued operations; while there are these daily witnesses for him, these standing proofs of his providence, it is not reason, it is corrupt prejudice and perverse obstinacy which call for further evidence.

The case is similar with respect to a future state of rewards and punishments, made known to us in the Scriptures. Reason acquiesces in those proofs of their certainty and reality which the Scriptures set before us. In the affairs of this life, our conduct is determined by far inferior degrees of evidence. It is plain, therefore, that they abuse their reason, who disregard the Scriptures with respect to their eternal concerns.

When unbelief proceeds, as for the most part it may be feared it does, from corruption of heart, we can hardly expect that any increase of light and evidence in the understanding will prove a remedy. Would the man who denies God, be persuaded into the belief of him, by the sight of an apparition? Would such a sight be a more rational ground for the acknowledgment of a Deity, than the whole visible creation, and the existence of all the millions of men now living upon the face of the whole earth? If he can account for the existence of all these

without admitting the idea of a God as the cause, would he find any difficulty in accounting for the revivification of one man after he had been supposed to be dead? With equal facility, the deist who can discredit all the proofs in favour of the Scriptures, would dispense with the testimony of one coming from the dead. If the depravity of his heart prompts him to disregard the warnings of Scripture; the same depravity, after the fright should be over, would triumph over the admonitions of a messenger from the other world. They who are determined to indulge their vices, are under a kind of necessity of denying and rejecting those truths which prohibit and condemn them. Their deeds being evil, they hate the light which reproves them. They affect doubts and scruples of the word of God, that they may have an excuse for disregarding his laws. They call for more evidence, not because they really desire it, or are willing to be convinced by it; but merely as a plea for not being convinced by that which they have already.

With such men, no degrees of evidence, neither messengers from the dead, nor any other miracle, will have a permanent effect. Sacred history sets before us many striking experiments tried in vain upon such characters. What prodigies were wrought in the sight of Pharaoh and the Egyptians; yet they were hardened under all these wonders. Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness, and so determined was he in the pursuit after them, that he was

hardly to be stopped by the terror of an angel from heaven, standing with a drawn sword to oppose him. The Israelites at Sinai heard the immediate voice of God, addressing them from heaven; and, throughout their journies in the wilderness, beheld miracles every day, yet they continued a stiff-necked and gainsaying people. When, in fulness of time, the Son of God himself appeared among them, and did the "works which never man did before," works so astonishing as seemed sufficient to have reclaimed the very worst of sinners (those of Tyre and Sidon, of Sodom and Gomorrah), these carnal, worldly-hearted Jews repented not and believed not. Among them was fulfilled the very thing requested by the rich man on the behalf of his brethren; another Lazarus was raised from the dead, came and testified unto them; yet they were not persuaded. Nay, when Christ himself, in fulfilment of his own prediction, a prediction well known to the Jewish rulers, rose from the dead on the third day; instead of believing on him, with what virulence did they set themselves to smother and suppress the knowledge of this fact. The avaricious soldiers, too, who had quaked with fear, while beholding it at the dawn of the morning, did yet, on that very day, suffer themselves to be hired to bear false testimony against it. Are not these astonishing illustrations of the assertion in the text, that they who "hear not Moses and the Prophets would not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead?"

By not *hearing* Moses and the Prophets, is meant not *obeying* them. The Jews in general professed to believe them. So multitudes at this day profess to believe the Gospel, who obey it not. They might also, in the same sense, believe the admonitions of a messenger from the dead, and yet not obey them. Certain it is that such a messenger could not enforce obedience by arguments more weighty, motives more solemn and awful, than those urged in the Gospel. Of course, they who believe the Gospel, and yet disobey it, would from the same principles disobey a messenger from the dead. With reference, therefore, to every class of incorrigible sinners, whether atheists, deists, or professed Christians who live wickedly, the assertion in the text holds true, "neither would they be persuaded, though one should come to them from the dead."

My hearers, it may well restrain us from wishing to see and converse with any of our deceased friends, or desiring any other extraordinary method to be used for our conversion, to consider that without the concurring influences of the Spirit of God, no means whatever will prove effectual. In the diligent use of the appointed means of grace, we are encouraged to hope for the assistance of the Holy Spirit. But if we undervalue these, hoping that God will attempt our recovery by some extraordinary interposition, we may provoke him to withdraw his spirit from us. If so presumptuous a desire should be gratified, yet, not being accompanied with

sanctifying grace, it might serve in the end but to enhance and aggravate our condemnation. They who are careless and indifferent about waiting upon God, and seeking his grace in his appointed way, can have no ground to hope for success in those other ways which are of their own devising.

A thorough conviction of the reality of that misery, in which the rich man was plunged, would rouse each of us, one and all, to the most earnest, fervent, and unremitting diligence in seeking the grace of God. Nothing would tempt us to forego any opportunity favourable to our spiritual improvement and eternal wellbeing. By our eagerness and zeal in embracing every such opportunity, we should be seen flying from the wrath to come, pressing into the kingdom of God, striving to secure our entrance at the strait gate, seizing by a holy violence on that prize of immortality, that hope of life eternal, which the Gospel sets before us. The apparent reverse of all this in the feelings and conduct of most people, is owing to their incredulity or insensibility of their liableness to the misery of the undone wretch in the text. They have no realizing apprehension of any such danger awaiting them. But why is it that they are thus secure? To what can it be owing that they do not see and feel their danger. Has it not been announced to them by those of whose veracity they can have no pretence to doubt? In the text, our Saviour implicitly declares, that the people who lived under the old Testament dispensation, favoured

with the writings of Moses and the Prophets, had in *them* sufficient warning of the dreadful punishment which would overtake them in another world, should they leave this in a state of impenitence. If one were to go to them from the dead, and testify to them the horrible torments which the souls of their deceased ungodly kindred were at that instant suffering in hell,—such a testimony from such a messenger would not be equal to, nor so worthy of their belief, as was that of Moses and the Prophets. Thus without excuse were unbelievers among the ancient Israelites. Much more, however, has been done for us, who are favoured with the light of christianity. In addition to the same Moses and the Prophets, we have Christ and his Apostles. So much fuller and clearer is what the Gospel has made known to us above what had been before taught concerning a future state, a heaven and a hell, that it has almost removed the veil which hides from us those unseen states. So much superior are its discoveries, that it is extolled as having brought them to light. It is the testimony, not of a vanishing ghost, but of a person next in dignity to the eternal Father of the whole creation; the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person, sitting with him at his right hand on the throne of the universe, having the eternal destinies of all men in his hands. From him who is thus exalted, and invested with the keys of hell and death, with power to admit into heaven, and to lock in hell—we are assured of life eternal

for as many as believe in and obey him; and of death eternal in reserve for all the wicked and impenitent. To the one it will be said, "Come, ye blessed;" to the other, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!"

As specimens of the execution of these two opposite sentences, in the parable of which the text is a part, the same faithful and true witness selects two individuals, and contrasts their different conditions in this life and in the next. One has large possessions, dwells in a palace, is arrayed in princely robes, in purple and fine linen, and partakes of all the luxuries of the world, faring sumptuously every day. The other is a beggar lying at the gate of his opulent neighbour, unable to help himself, and without any means of subsistence—covered over with disgusting ulcers—all exposed naked to the air and to the dogs—being destitute alike both of clothes and of food, and who would have been glad to share with the dogs in what fell from the table within the palace. After the death of these two men, the future scene opens,—the second contrast begins, setting before us their condition in the unseen world. The beggar, at the heavenly banquet, reclines on the bosom of the great father of the faithful. The rich man, in hell, suffering exquisite torture, witnesses the present felicity of the beggar, and now desires from him a drop of water, more earnestly than *he* had before longed for the crumbs of his table. The great gulf, excluding all intercourse or

transition from one state to the other, leaves the miserable sufferer absolutely hopeless.

In the opposite conditions of these two men, we see what each of us has to expect after this life, according to our respective characters, as righteous or wicked, as those who obey or disobey the Gospel of Christ. Ought we not to have a full and unwavering belief in these things? After God has spoken them to us by his Son from heaven, is it not wonderful that there should be any among us who profess to believe in Christ, and yet boldly reject these his doctrines. The fact, however, is, that in this vicinity there are several large congregations, calling themselves Christians, and observing the forms of christian worship, whose teachers are understood to deny all future punishment; and who assure their hearers, that, be their characters what they may, they will all, when they die, be received into Abraham's bosom. This belief is reported to prevail more or less throughout the country, and to be espoused by some in almost every parish. Can there be a more complete subversion of the whole system of the Gospel, or a more daring attempt to make Christ the minister of sin, and the great patron of sinners? Can any error be more fatal to the souls of men, more pernicious to their morals and manners, or more threatening to good order and government? May not all sorts of crimes be expected to follow where such opinions have gone before and paved the way?

There is another description of universalists among us, whose tenets are not so directly pernicious to virtue, but yet, as not according with the form of sound words contained in the Scriptures, cannot, in my view, be adopted with safety;—I mean those who admit the certainty and reality of future punishment, but deny that it will be eternal. Their imagination is shocked at the idea of a misery that will never end, of “a fire which is never quenched, and of a worm which never dies.” They endeavour, therefore, to believe, that after a certain period of torment, the rich man, with the wicked in general, will be brought to repent, and will then be liberated;—that the great gulf will be filled up, or a bridge thrown over it on which they may pass to heaven. We should all most joyfully hail this belief, were it supported by scripture authority. But had it been the design of Christ, that we should so believe, would he not have given some hint or intimation of the kind in the parable before us, or in some or other of his various discourses on the day of judgment and final consummation of all things? In all these, however, the reverse is explicitly affirmed. Throughout the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, *destruction, perdition, everlasting punishment* are the threatened and predicted end of the wicked. How, then, can salvation be their final portion?

According to this theory, future punishment will be disciplinary; like the afflictions of the present

life, all intended for the benefit of the sufferers, to bring them to repentance, and so to salvation. But this hypothesis is so far from being supported, that it is explicitly contradicted by the general tenor of Scripture. The late Dr. Chauncy admitted that the punishment of the wicked might continue for a very long duration, even for ages of ages, though he was confident it would cease on their repentance, that each sufferer would be released as soon as he should repent. But will they not all repent at the moment when they shall be convinced of the reality of this misery? Could repentance then avail them, surely the sight, without the experience of hell torments, must be sufficient to produce it. "When once the master of the house has risen up, and shut the door," at that juncture, the excluded are represented as repenting, "knocking," and with the utmost importunity supplicating admission. The dreadful reply which they receive, shows their repentance to be too late.

What room for hope can there be, in favour of those who shall receive "judgment without mercy—the full recompense of their deeds—be punished according to their works,"—and being once in the place of punishment, "shall not come forth thence till they have paid the uttermost farthing?" Of course, they must suffer the full penalty of God's law. If after this they shall be saved, their salvation will be, not of grace, but on the ground of their having, in their own persons, answered the demands

of the law. But is not a salvation of this kind represented, throughout the Gospel, as impossible? How often is the assertion repeated, "by the deeds of the law, no flesh shall be justified."

My brethren, after nearly three score and ten years' acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures, it does appear to me to have been the intention of the writers of them, that we should believe that if we die in our sins, impenitent and unrenewed, we shall be lost and undone forever! This fear is set before us on purpose, that it may aid and facilitate our escape from the threatened danger. I appeal to your judgment, whether it will not be more wise and rational to cherish this fear, than to attempt to abate or lessen it? Tremendous as the idea is, should we not keep it always in our thoughts, till it has produced the effect intended by our Saviour's discourse in the text; and brought us to a fixed resolution to part with our sins, and to comply with all those duties prescribed as necessary to the working out of our salvation? May the divine mercy grant that we may all fly from the wrath to come, and take hold on eternal life!

SERMON VI.

PHARISEES' RIGHTEOUSNESS.

MATTHEW v. 20.

Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

THESE words occur in what is called our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. In that discourse, he explains the true meaning of various precepts contained in the divine law, and vindicates these precepts from the corrupt glosses and false constructions of the Scribes and Pharisees. In this connexion, the text comes in as a solemn caution against the corrupt principles of those Jewish teachers.

In the writings of the Evangelists, no words are of more frequent occurrence, than *Scribes* and *Pharisees*. They are thus generally mentioned together, probably on account of their close affinity and agreement with each other. In our Saviour's time, those among the Jews who were devoted to the study of the law, its authorized transcribers and public ex-

pounders, had the title of *Scribes* and *Doctors of the Law*. They were its regular public teachers, the preaching clergy who instructed the people, while the priests attended the sacrifices. Their profession and the duties of their office required in them a most thorough knowledge of the holy Scriptures; and this they were supposed to possess, as appears from Herod's consulting with the "Scribes of the people," as well as with the chief priests, when he wished to learn where, according to the prophecies, the "Messiah should be born."

The Pharisees were a religious sect or denomination, distinguished from others by their own peculiarities; and these peculiarities consisted in their claim to a knowledge of the law more accurate, a veneration for it more profound, and an observance of it more strict and scrupulous, than were professed by others. It may naturally be supposed that the Scribes were generally of this sect, among whom the law of God was held in such high estimation. On account of their officiating as public teachers, the Scribes and Pharisees are said "to sit in Moses' seat;" and our Saviour exhorts the people to regard and obey them so far as they taught the uncorrupted doctrines of Moses.

We are to remember that, at this time, the Jewish religion, as contained in the writings of Moses and the Prophets, was the only true religion in the world; and the Jewish nation the only people on earth by whom this religion was professed. To

them pertained the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises. From the early ages of the world, they had been the depositaries of the oracles of God. On them alone had the light of divine revelation directly and immediately shone ; and them only had Jehovah acknowledged as his chosen people. Their country was the valley of vision. They inherited it is a promised possession, a type of the heavenly Canaan, the future incorruptible inheritance reserved for the saints in light. God had not dealt so with any other nation ; and as for his revealed judgments, they were unknown to whole heathen world.

Of all descriptions of people in this so highly favoured and distinguished nation, the Scribes and Pharisees held the first rank, and were the most eminent for their religious character. As the instructors of their brethren, the study of religion was essential to their profession ; and they had opportunity and advantages for superior attainments in knowledge. As Pharisees, the peculiarities of their profession required and supposed them to possess a degree of sanctity above others. Their righteousness was supposed to exceed what was obligatory on the people at large, and even to rise above the requirements of the law. Such was their reputation for piety, devotion, and sanctity of manners, that it is reported to have become a proverbial saying, "that if but two men went to heaven, one of them would be a Pharisee."

How startled, may we then suppose, were our Lord's hearers at his declaration in the text! To his present auditors, and, through them, to us and to all others, with the utmost solemnity he declares, that unless our righteousness, our inherent holiness, shall exceed that inculcated by the doctrines, or exhibited in the lives of the Scribes and Pharisees, unless it be of a different nature from theirs, we shall, by no means, be acknowledged as his subjects or admitted to the privileges of his heavenly kingdom.

My hearers, we may not imagine ourselves uninterested in this declaration. In thus deciding upon the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, the great Head of the church, and final Judge of the world, certainly intended our admonition and warning. As what was said with reference to them, was upon a subject which is now as greatly interesting to ourselves, it should naturally awaken our most earnest attention. Were you seeking to be introduced to some great and powerful prince, on whose favour your whole fortune depended, and were you apprized that your appearing in a particular dress would be necessary to your admission; if it were at the same time announced that certain applicants before you, confident that they were rightly habited, had been utterly rejected on account of their having judged amiss on this article,—would you not solicitously inquire in what habit they had made the attempt, and most diligently compare it with your

own? Or were the possession of a great estate or some high dignities proposed, on condition of acquiring skill in a certain art or science; and a number of candidates, after much trouble and pains thus to accomplish themselves, had been pronounced deficient in the requisite qualifications, and thereby missed their objects,—would you not, engaged in the same pursuit, and aiming at the same objects, wish to learn the particular defects which occasioned their claims to be set aside? Would you not fear lest yourselves might fall into similar mistakes, and meet with a similar disappointment?

As Christians, my brethren, the objects of our professed aim are, not the favours and honours of earthly princes, nor the peculiar treasure of kings, nor any worldly possessions or dignities; but the privileges and blessings of the Messiah's kingdom, the heavenly inheritance and life eternal in store for all his qualified subjects. At all times, under the law as well as under the Gospel, true religion, inherent righteousness or holiness, is the qualification indispensably requisite to the actual possession of these objects. The attainment of them was undoubtedly the aim of the Scribes and Pharisees of old, and they took much pains, in their way, to acquire what they thought the necessary qualifications. It has been already shown, that, of all men, they were favoured with the greatest external advantages for understanding and practising that righteousness without which no man can see the Lord. They had in-

deed a sort of righteousness, its outward appearance at least. For any neglect or defect in the forms of godliness, they seem not to have been censured. They were constant and regular in attending the sacrifices, oblations, divers washings, and other ceremonial observances of the Mosaic ritual. Formerly, in the age of Malachi, their whole nation had been charged with a backwardness to furnish the means for the support of God's worship. They were accused of robbing God in "tithes and offerings,"—through a greedy avarice, defrauding the ministers of religion of those tenths by law required for their support. But so anxious were the Pharisees to escape all reproach in this respect, that they tithed the minutest articles of their produce. They would not make use of the common herbs of their gardens, till the tenth part of them had been first consecrated to religion. In the observance of public festivals and the seasons appropriated to the duties of religion, no men could be more scrupulous, exact, and even rigorous. Nay, that they might not be wanting in any form of devotion, or appearance of bodily mortification, it was peculiar to the sect of the Pharisees to set apart, over and above what the law had appointed, two days in every week for private, personal devotion.

My brethren, when we consider these appearances of piety, and compare them with the face of religion among ourselves at the present day, are we not above measure astonished and alarmed at the

declaration of our Saviour in the text? If these Pharisees, who made conscience of performing so many religious duties, and who expended so much time and pains in the performance of them, did, after all, fail of that righteousness which is essential to our being the heirs of salvation, what must become of the present generation of mankind? True indeed it is, that there may be the appearance of religion without the reality, and the form of godliness without the power; but, on the other part, it is equally true, that there can be no religion in those who are destitute of its appearance, no godliness in those who neglect its forms. From the tree covered with leaves and blossoms, and exhibiting a most beautiful and promising appearance, it is not certain beforehand that any fruit will be gathered; but from the tree already dead, which neither buds, nor blossoms, nor puts forth leaves, we know that there can be no fruit. The latter is evidently the present state of all those persons in whom there are no appearances of religion, who respect it neither in their own houses nor in the house of God, but customarily neglect all its seasons and duties. If such persons entertain any hope beyond this life, it cannot be founded on the Gospel of Christ. They can have no pretence for flattering themselves with the expectation of any future benefit or advantage from him. If they would allow themselves to reflect upon the subject, they must know with the fullest certainty, that, in their present state, they are uninterested in

Christ, unentitled to salvation through him,—that they are of the number of those of whom it is said, that “they are condemned already,” and that “the wrath of God abideth on them.” We may and ought to lament over such characters; but as, by the supposition, they are not the customary attendants on God’s house and worship, they cannot be here addressed.

Our present inquiries concern ourselves. As professed Christians, we have a sort of righteousness. Let us then examine whether it be better, whether it exceed that of the Pharisees. In outward forms we are required to equal them. It was a part of Christ’s mission into the world to abolish the more burdensome and showy parts of the ancient religion. In lieu of all the numerous rites and ceremonies of Moses, baptism and the Lord’s supper are the only positive institutions of Christ. These, accompanied with prayer and praise and the ministry of the word, constitute the public forms of Christian worship. One day in seven is the only time expressly appropriated to these purposes. The many other sabbaths and holy days required of old by the Mosaic law, are now made common by the Gospel of Christ. The duties of secret and family devotion, being the dictates of natural religion, and, in some sort, observed by the heathen nations, cannot be said to be peculiar to the religion of Christ. The rites and forms of this religion being so few and easy, may it not be supposed that they will all be

regularly and conscientiously observed by every one who is truly religious? The fact, however, is, that the greater part of those who are called Christians, conduct as though it were left to their own discretion whether to observe the whole form of christian godliness, or certain parts only, and these parts to such a degree, and at such seasons only as may chance to suit their own convenience. Accordingly, we see the great majority of our religious assemblies uniformly excusing themselves from honouring the christian eucharist; while some of them show an equal indifference towards that ordinance which stamps a visibility of Christ, and gives a title to his name. What form or public appearance of religion have we, excepting the Lord's day? And in the observance of this, what a variety prevails! Some think it quite sufficient if they go to church once a day. Better Christians, indeed, make a point of attending the evening as well as the morning service; but having done this, many of them seem to think themselves excused from whatever else has the appearance of religion. Indeed their lukewarmness, their lassitude, their impatience at the tedious length of God's worship, their eagerness to have it over, their haste to return to more agreeable exercises or amusements, and their dexterity in finding excuses for worldly occupations on the Lord's day, may seem to imply a drawback upon the credit which might otherwise be due to their zeal for his honour.

My brethren, I will submit a supposed case to your consideration: I will suppose that Christ, instead of setting aside, had continued upon the neck of his disciples the yoke imposed by Moses;—that in order to our enjoying the privileges of his subjects, we were still required to attend all the costly sacrifices and numerous ceremonies of the law, and, besides the exact and scrupulous observance of these forms, were required (a circumstance, perhaps, more nearly touching the sensibility of a certain class of people) absolutely to part with a whole tenth of our annual incomes to the support of religion. Were these the terms proposed by the Gospel, I would ask, what number of persons among us, in your consciences, ye imagine, would offer themselves as candidates for the kingdom of heaven, and persevere in seeking it by a righteousness equal in labour and and expense to that of the Scribes and Pharisees?

In this case, however, far as it is beyond almost any apparent example of religion in modern times, our Lord in the text declares, that even such candidates would ultimately fail of success. The truth is, that the righteousness of the Pharisees, however specious in appearance, exact and complete in externals, was yet essentially defective in that sanctification of the heart and affections, and devotion of them to God and his service, which Moses, as well as Christ, requires as the life and soul of all true religion. The love of God is the first and great command; as shed abroad in the heart, it is the princi-

ple of true obedience to every other command, the root from which all the branches of righteousness spring forth ; the spirit which inspires and animates the whole system of true godliness, without which, rites and forms and all outward appearances are mere statues, lifeless pictures, empty shadows, sounding brass, and tinkling cymbals.

The want of this principle was the grand and fatal defect in the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, leaving it a baseless fabrick, an unfounded structure, a mere bodily exercise which could not profit. To them our Saviour peremptorily declared, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you." They busied themselves about trifles comparatively, while they neglected the weightier matters of the law. All their care and attention were taken up about rites and forms, were exhausted upon externals, in keeping the outside clean, while, their hearts and affections being neglected, every depraved desire and passion was suffered to grow and predominate within, and they were full of extortion and excess. On this account our Lord compared them to painted sepulchres, which seem beautiful without, and make a shining appearance, but within are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

Be assured, my brethren, that our religious acts, though they should extend to the outward observance of all the ordinances of the Gospel, and the regular support of the whole form of godliness ; yet

if they proceed not from a thorough change of heart, from our being regenerated by the Spirit of God, from our having become new creatures through his enlightening, quickening, and sanctifying influences on our souls,—they are, after all, but a Pharisaic righteousness. If we value ourselves upon them; if, in comparing ourselves with others, we feel a self-complacency and satisfaction that we are better than they, in that we have performed duties neglected by them; if we make these duties the basis of our hope towards God, and conclude that since we have done so much for him, have taken such pains to serve and glorify him, *He* will certainly show us mercy, as it would be inconsistent with his justice to withhold salvation from characters so faultless as ours;—if these be our inward feelings and reasonings, we are undoubtedly on the very rock where the Pharisees were wrecked. Of them it is said, that, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, “they went about to establish their own,” and from the deeds of the law, looked for justification before God. This was the common mistake of their nation, and proved the ground of their so general opposition to Christ and his Gospel. In that age, no error was deemed by the Apostles more dangerous and fatal. In most of his Epistles, St. Paul sets himself professedly, by various arguments, to expose and refute it. So much indeed upon this subject occurs throughout the New Testament, that but few Christians so confessedly trust to their own

righteousness, as did the Pharisees. Some variation has taken place in modifying the old mistake. Many seem to think that their own duties and virtues are the foundation, and that, where these fail, Christ will supply the breach, and his righteousness finish the structure. Hence their trust is divided between him and themselves.

But, my brethren, this scheme has no support in the Gospel, and is utterly irreconcilable with the gospel terms of repentance and faith. True and evangelical repentance confesses that our secret faults and open transgressions are innumerable, and that our very best services are mingled with imperfections sufficient for our condemnation. *Faith*, weary and heavy laden under the consciousness of this burden of guilt and ill desert, joyfully receives Christ as the Lord, our righteousness, whose obedience alone avails to our justification, and procures for us all the treasures of mercy and grace—receives him as “made of God unto us, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” Faith is the bond of union between Christ and his people, by virtue of which they derive strength from him for every good work which they perform.

Here, then, we may discern the nature and the principle of that righteousness, which is better than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. It results from that renovated state of mind which takes place on the exercise of repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is consequent upon our

being created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has ordained that we should walk in them, and it is performed through him, working in us both to will and to do.

These sentiments and impressions have taken such hold on the heart of the sincere Christian, as to produce a change in his habitual thoughts, temper, desires, aims, and pursuits. Old things pass away, and all things become new to the taste and relish of his mind. His affections are set on things above. Though he neglects not his temporal concerns, yet he regards them but with a subordinate view to objects incomparably more important. Feeling that he is not his own, that he has been bought with a price, he consecrates himself, body and soul, his worldly possessions, his time, his influence, his all, to the service of him by whom he has been redeemed ; and this, not from constraint, but willingly, from love, gratitude, and the pleasure which he experiences in what he believes to be the service of God. To him, the duties of religion are no longer a burden and a weariness, but his delight. His language is that of the Psalmist, " Oh how I love thy law ! How amiable are thy tabernacles ! I love the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth. I esteem thy precepts concerning all things to be right. I will run the way of thy commandments."

By a righteousness thus prompted by love and gratitude, faith and hope, men become the subjects of Christ's kingdom on earth, and qualify themselves for its enjoyment in heaven. May divine grace produce in us all a righteousness of this kind!

SERMON VII.

PRAYER.

ACTS ix. 11.

And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth.

THE man here called Saul of Tarsus, seems to have been an extraordinary person from his youth. He was indeed a Jew, as both his parents were of that nation; and by them he had been trained up in the religion of his fathers. But his birth was among the Asiatic Greeks in the city of Tarsus, the capital of the neighbouring province of Cilicia. In the schools of this city, young Saul received the first rudiments of learning, and was most probably favoured with peculiar advantages for an early proficiency in knowledge. Undoubtedly he became familiar with the learned works of the Grecian poets, orators, and philosophers. As he grew towards man's estate, he was sent from Tarsus to Jerusalem, there to finish his education under the celebrated

Gamaliel. This man was a member of the Sanhedrim, or supreme council of the Jews, and had great weight and authority in that assembly of the Elders. Such were his learning and abilities, that the "honour of the law is said to have failed with him." While he assisted in the national council, all the members hearkened to him, and his advice overruled their decisions. When the Apostles were first summoned before this assembly, Gamaliel appeared superior to passion and prejudice, and discovered becoming temper and moderation. But the growth of the new sect, and the boldness of the Apostles in disregarding the charge of the Elders, might have exasperated his spirit afterward, and induced him to encourage the zeal of his rash and fiery pupil.

Saul had just completed his studies and fitted himself for public employments, when he conceived the whole hierarchy of his country to be in danger of being overthrown by the prevalence of Christianity. With all the fire of youth and genius, and all the zeal of a flaming bigot, he engaged in the general persecution of the Christians. Resolved on their total extirpation, after the murder of Stephen and many others of both sexes at Jerusalem, he solicited a commission to carry on the bloody business in foreign and distant cities. His learning and accomplishments had probably already procured him a considerable reputation, or we can hardly suppose that the Sanhedrim would so readily have committed to him such an important trust. He was, as the context

relates, proceeding on a commission of this kind to Damascus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the church; and had already approached nigh unto the city, when he was suddenly and miraculously arrested in his career of guilt, and converted from a furious persecutor into a firm believer, and a most zealous preacher and defender of the very faith which he had set out to destroy. The Lord Jesus himself condescended to meet him in the way, and, by a voice from heaven, to convict him of his dreadful mistake. Overwhelmed with astonishment and horror at this conviction, being led into the city, he continued three days humbling himself for his great wickedness, fasting, and praying.

At the expiration of that term, an eminent disciple in Damascus was sent, as related in the text, to instruct and comfort him. By a vision the Lord directed Ananias into what street to go, and at whose house to inquire for a person called "Saul of Tarsus," adding as a reason for his mission, and as what should remove all scruples from his mind, "for behold, he prayeth!" This is evidently mentioned as an extraordinary occurrence worthy of particular remark, that such a character as Saul should be engaged in prayer,—that he, who had so lately breathed nothing but threatenings and slaughter, should now breathe nothing but prayer and the spirit of devotion. But had Saul never prayed before? In times past he had been accustomed to do that which he considered as praying. For he had

lived a Pharisee after the strictest sect, and the Pharisees abounded in prayer. They prayed not only in the synagogues, but in the markets and in the corners of the streets, and were accustomed to make long prayers. After their manner, Saul had undoubtedly been in the habit of praying; and like them, he probably set a high value on his prayers. They were all, however, performed amiss, and were nothing in God's account. The observation upon him, "behold, he prayeth," implies that, till the present juncture, he had never prayed in an acceptable manner. Heretofore he had but said his prayers; what he now did was really praying, and had in it all the qualifications of devotion acceptable to God.

Such prayer is the exercise of the best affections of our nature towards their highest and infinitely most worthy object. Thrown as we are on the stage of life, empty, impotent, dependent beings; our feelings prompt us to solicit the assistance of that great Being, who has seen fit to give us existence. Our thoughts are withdrawn from the creatures, and fixed upon the Creator. Our spirit is conscious of its near approach to the great Father of spirits, and, under a lively sense of his presence, greatness, and goodness, recognizes and adores his matchless perfections and glorious character; gratefully acknowledges its obligations to him for life, with all its attendant blessings and comforts; confesses and laments its own imperfection and unwor-

thiness, fervently imploring pardon for whatever has been amiss in time past, and grace to amend for the future. Convinced of its own utter insufficiency to obtain or secure its own enjoyment—feeling its entire and absolute dependence upon the great Author of all created existence, it humbly expresses before him its desires for such blessings as may be suitable to its circumstances, and consistent with the divine wisdom to bestow. It refers and submits, however, all its requests to be granted or denied according to his good pleasure, still hoping in God and rejoicing in his unlimited power and goodness, as confident that he will ultimately do more than the petitioner can ask or think. The tendency of such exercises to purify the heart, to control the passions, to compose and tranquillize the mind, to give a serene dignity and elevation to its views and hopes, and cause it to rest in God as its chief and supreme good, cannot be questioned. It produces a frame of mind and constitutes a general temper, in the highest degree fitted for happiness and self-enjoyment under all circumstances. The spirit of prayer is a spirit of true piety, of humility, of gratitude, of resignation, and of hope in God. Of course, it may be expected to produce an inward peace, passing the understanding of those by whom it has never been experienced.

In the following discourse, we design to inquire into the nature of acceptable prayer,—a subject which will not be thought uninteresting,

when it is considered, that we ourselves, like Saul and the Pharisees of old, are liable to self-deception, and to think that we pray, when in the true import of the duty, we do not. The things implied in acceptable prayer, may be summarily comprized in this definition, namely, Prayer is the expression of the desires of a suppliant and grateful heart to God, in the name of Christ, for things agreeable to his will. In the illustration of this, it may be observed,

First, That prayer is the expression of the desires of the heart. This ought to be deeply fixed in our minds. Proper and suitable words are to be used, but, with respect to the Searcher of hearts, they are wholly insignificant, when not accompanied with correspondent desires. The best composed forms of devotion, when repeated with no fixed attention to their meaning, are but a presumptuous trifling with the Almighty. We think of prayers in an unknown tongue as a kind of solemn mockery. But though we should understand the meaning of our words when we pretend to pray, yet, if the meaning of our hearts be different, our prayers are nothing but a pretence. They are so far from being a reasonable and acceptable service, that they are in reality an offence to God. How often and strongly has he expressed his displeasure at those who draw nigh to him with their mouths, and honour him with their lips, whilst their hearts are far from him!

If we be not on our guard and watchful over the workings of our hearts, we may be greatly de-

ceived with respect to the nature of our devotions. Reason and conscience may teach us what things are proper and worthy to be desired; but we may mistake these dictates of conscience for desires. Under this delusion we may pray for things which we know ought to be desired, though no such desire has place in our hearts. Our reason may be convinced that the things contained in that form of prayer taught us by our Saviour, ought to be desired. Under this conviction we may repeat the form, and pray, that God's "name may be hallowed," while at the same time no reverence and adoration may have place in our hearts. We may pray that his "kingdom may come, and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven;" and at the same instant, the most predominant desire of our hearts may be in opposition to the precepts of his law and the disposals of his providence. We may pray that he would keep us from temptation, while in our hearts we may be forming the purpose of knowingly going into the way of temptation.

The covetous and worldly may pray against the love of riches; the proud and ambitious may pray for humility; and the openly vicious for the reformation of their lives; while the real desires of each of these characters may be in direct opposition to the language of their lips. How depraved and sinful must those men be, who can thus venture to prevaricate in their addresses to the God of truth! It is possible, however, that, in many instances, they

may be guilty of this, and yet remain insensible of their insincerity. Not distinguishing between the dictates of conscience and the real desires of their hearts, they may think that they have performed an acceptable service to God when they have verbally asked of him the things which they are conscious ought to be desired. Instead of being prompted by any of the feelings of true piety, they may be led by sinister and interested views to the expression of such desires in prayer. The motive of him who leads in social worship, may be as unworthy as was that of the Pharisees of old. Like them he may aim at being seen of men, and at gaining a character for devotion. It may gratify his vanity to strike and captivate the audience, by showing how fluent, or how fervent, or how solemn he can be.

Sincerity, my brethren, is a qualification absolutely essential to the acceptance of our prayers. Without this, we offer but the sacrifice of fools. Unless the real desires of our hearts be expressed, our prayers will of course be hypocritical. In what manner, then, are our devotions performed? Do they consist of real and hearty desires, or of good words only? Are you not wont to be more solicitous about propriety of expression, than the pouring out of your heart before God! How often have you from memory repeated over a set of words in a formal way, and recorded this for a prayer, while your insensible heart has borne no part in the performance! Have you not been more careful to

consider what you ought to pray for, than to discover and express your real desires? If it be your commendable, and at this day, alas! almost singular practice, daily to pray in your family and in your closet; yet it may not be amiss for you to reflect, whether these devotions be any thing more than mere forms to which you have become accustomed. While you verbally ask God to make you holy and obedient to his commands, is there no sinful course in which you habitually indulge? Do you not often pretend to thank and praise God for his great goodness towards you, whilst he sees your heart to be void of all grateful emotions? What numbers at stated seasons join in thanksgiving to Heaven for Christ, and the way of salvation through him, while they practically persist in making light of him, and in neglecting his salvation!

When we join in public worship, do we carefully attend to the petitions expressed, and yield our hearty *Amen* so far as they accord with our desires? This is incumbent upon all who pretend to unite in social or public prayers. The hearts of the whole assembly should be joined with that of the speaker in the addresses which he presents to God. If, instead of thus fixing your attention, you suffer not only your eyes, but your thoughts to wander; though others may pray, yet *you* do not—you present nothing but your body before the Lord. With how many of those who attend the forms of worship, is this usually the case! How many are habitually

thus careless and inattentive, and yet feel no consciousness of guilt on that account! We all, indeed, have reason to lament that our hearts are so prone, like a deceitful bow, to start aside from our duty; and that vain or wandering thoughts are so often mingled with our devotions. But when these things are the grief and burden of the mind, though they may imply its weakness and imperfection, yet they are no proof of its insincerity. Amidst the occasional confusion of such intruding thoughts, there may be an habitual aim at the divine honour. The utmost vigilance, however, ought to be used in guarding against them. You would do well to spend a little time in serious consideration before you begin your address to God. Examine your heart, and inquire what are its true and genuine desires. Review the expressions which you are accustomed to use in prayer, and compare them with your inward feelings. Having entered on the duty, attend to the import of every sentence, and speak with such deliberation, that your desires may accompany your utterance, and, if possible, prompt your expressions.

The heart of a good Christian, when warmed with devotion, may so abound with holy desires, as to quicken his utterance and give fluency to his language. Such fervour is not to be repressed or discountenanced. But whenever it is experienced, it is probably the effect of that serious musing which is here recommended. By this previous meditation,

the whole soul may become engaged, and all its faculties devoutly and delightfully exercised in the duty of prayer. "Be not rash with thy mouth," says the wise man, "and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God." This is an express caution against a thoughtless address to God, or a hasty rushing into the presence of the greatest and best of Beings. The thought that he cannot be deceived and will not be mocked, should effectually restrain us from uttering with our lips what we neither feel nor wish in our hearts.

Secondly, Prayer implies supplication, or an expression of the supplicating desires of the heart. We may express real desires to God for the bestowment of certain blessings, and yet not pray acceptably. The temper and disposition of the heart are different under different circumstances. Those of the creditor in asking for his due, are very different from those of the humble beggar requesting alms. The one asks for that to which he feels himself justly entitled; the other for that to which he pretends no claim. The desires of the latter only partake of the nature of prayer. We do not and cannot pray for that which we consider as our due. We may indeed express our desires in the form of a prayer, but in our hearts we do not pray. Our desires are not of a suppliant nature. We feel not a supplicating, but a demanding temper. Praying is not demanding. Subjects may express their desires to their sovereign for their rights and privileges in the form of a pray-

er, but in heart and reality they make a demand. They esteem the granting of their request a matter of right, and not of mere grace and favour in their prince. Nay, while he refuses or delays, they look upon themselves as injured and oppressed. In their hearts at least, they blame and censure him as unjust. But the same disposition in a traitor justly condemned for treasonable practices, would be wholly improper and unbecoming. He might deprecate the execution of the sentence against him, and pray for pardon; but would have no ground for complaint, and, if properly sensible of his guilt, would not in his heart blame his sovereign, though his petition should be rejected.

Does not prayer to God require the exercise of a similar temper? When an assembly of sinful men stand praying, ought they not to "consider themselves as so many malefactors, met to implore the mercy of their great Judge?" On every occasion, ought we not to appear as suppliants at the throne of grace? Should not our requests to God be attended with such a sense of our unworthiness and ill desert, as might dispose us to acknowledge his justice, though he should disregard them? Does he not expect and require, that in all our approaches to him we confess ourselves to be, what we are, erring, sinful creatures, less than the least of his mercies? In proportion as we fail of this self-abasement in the divine presence, will not the desires which we express to God, in language however humble, savour

more of a demanding than of a supplicating temper? How then can we expect his acceptance? "He resisteth the proud, while he gives grace to the humble."

If our prayers in times past, my brethren, have not been answered, it may be that we have been ready to doubt whether God is a Being who regards or hears prayer; whether his mercy and faithfulness be such as his word represents them; in short, whether there be any profit in praying unto him. But before we entertain these unworthy suspicions of the Father of mercies, ought we not to inquire whether our prayers have not been deficient in this important qualification of humility? Have they flowed from a broken heart, from a humble and contrite spirit? Have they been offered up under a suitable sense of our own unworthiness? Has the manner of our presenting them been sincere, fervent, and humble? Instead of distrusting the divine promises, have we not greater reason to distrust our own performances, to doubt whether we have not asked amiss, and so failed of the condition upon which the promise is suspended? All the blessings tendered to sinners in the Gospel, are represented as proceeding from free, unmerited grace, both in the primary offer, and in the ultimate bestowment. Unless they be thus regarded in all our requests to God for them, we cannot seek them aright.

Thirdly, In acceptable prayer, the supplicating desires of a *grateful heart* are expressed. Being absolutely dependent upon God for all our past and

present enjoyments, we cannot with a suitable temper apply to him for farther blessings, if we be insensible of those which we have already received. Ingratitude for past mercies must necessarily exclude us from the hope of future blessings. A grateful sense of the infinite obligations under which he has laid us already, should attend every renewed application to God. Accordingly, St. Paul, in his directions respecting prayer, joins with it thanksgiving—“in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”

Fourthly, These supplicating desires of a grateful heart, must be expressed or offered up to God with faith in his being and perfections. Just and worthy apprehensions of the infinite object to whom we make our address, should attend every act of devotion. We cannot indeed comprehend his infinity; but we may clearly apprehend and firmly believe in his being and glorious perfections. In our approaches to him, we may cherish in our minds a lively sense of his presence, power, and goodness. We may clearly conceive and firmly believe him to be both able and willing to do exceedingly and abundantly above what we can ask or think. With such thoughts of him, are we not directed to make our approach, when we are told, that “whosoever cometh unto God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him?” I observe,

Fifthly, That, in order to our prayers being acceptable to God, they must be for things agreeable to his will. Of this kind are all spiritual and eternal blessings, all the means of moral improvement in this life, and of everlasting happiness in the next. For these, our desires cannot be too strong, nor rise too high; nor can we be too fervent or importunate in pouring out these desires to God. But with respect to temporal blessings, as we know not what will be upon the whole good for us, we must set bounds to our desires. While we are allowed to petition for whatever may be necessary to our comfortable subsistence, we are cautioned against coveting the great things of life, or those objects of pride and luxury, which vanity, custom, or a disorderly fancy may seem to have made necessary to us. We may pray conditionally for that which in our view may seem most desirable; at the same time acknowledging our ignorance, and referring all our requests to the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father, to grant or deny them as he sees will be most for his glory and our best good, holding ourselves in readiness to acquiesce in whatever he shall appoint. I add,

In the sixth, and last place, as what the Gospel teaches to be an important qualification in our prayers, That they be presented to God in the name of Christ, with a humble dependence on his merits and intercession as the ground of their acceptance. We are taught to view his mediation as the channel through

which all the streams of the divine mercy and goodness are conveyed to apostate men, as the procuring cause of all our present enjoyments and future hopes; and his intercession as that alone which can render our prayers successful, or our persons acceptable to God. In all our approaches to the throne of grace we are to remember, that through Christ alone we are allowed access to God, and that he is the medium of our whole intercourse with the Father. Every act of devotion and religious service must be offered in the name of the Lord Jesus, in imitation of his example, in obedience to his authority, and in reliance on his intercession for its acceptance with God.

I have now, my hearers, endeavoured in several particulars to explain to you what I apprehend to be the nature of acceptable prayer. Our obligations to this duty must appear, when we consider how reasonable and suitable it is to all our ideas of moral fitness, that creatures, in themselves ignorant, weak, and dependent, should, with humble prostration, adore the self-sufficient and all-sufficient Creator; thanking him for his innumerable benefits daily received, and supplicating the bestowment of those which they still need. What though the omniscient Being knows our wants already, and can receive no information from us? What though, being infinite in goodness, he will do that which is upon the whole best, without our entreaty or persuasion? Still these concessions do not supersede the use and reasona-

bleness of prayer. This duty is not intended to produce its effects upon God, but upon ourselves. It is not designed to inform him of any thing with which he was before unacquainted, nor to move him to that to which he is indisposed. But on our own minds, its influence will be great and beneficial, impressing them with a sense of our wants and of our dependence upon the divine bounty for their supply, and in this way bringing us into a suitable frame for receiving what God may see fit to give.

Indeed, we cannot conceive of a greater privilege indulged to sinful mortals, than the liberty of access to the throne of grace; and none who are truly religious, can neglect a duty enjoined by so many precepts and examples in the word of God. Serious minds are drawn to the regular observance of it by the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, and by the pleasure which they experience in devotional exercises. But there is no end to the excuses which undevout minds will frame for the neglect of a duty which they have no heart to perform. At the present day, indeed, it is so difficult to persuade people in general to say, or even read their prayers, that there seems little hope of success in any attempts to engage them in the true spirit of devotion. It is incumbent, however, on the minister of religion, to inculcate this, as well as the other duties of christianity.

With those who live without prayer, the fear of God's displeasure is the motive the most likely to have influence. Are there any so hardy as to

disregard or resist this motive? Are there any, who will still cast off fear and restrain prayer? It must be because they are utterly thoughtless, and consider not what a Being God is. Open your eyes, I beseech you, upon his works in every direction around you. Look up to the heavens, "the spacious firmament on high." Consider the sun, that immense globe of fire, whose splendor overspreads the hemisphere with light. Observe the milder lustre and the serene majesty of the moon, ruling the night. Let worlds on worlds be presented to your imagination in the hosts of stars gilding the celestial arch. Think of the rapidity and yet perfect regularity of their motions, through the lapse of ages, from the beginning of time. From these celestial heights, descend in your thoughts to this earth, swarming with inhabitants, and yet made to furnish regular supplies for all, satisfying the desires of every living thing. Mark the rotation of the seasons, and the vicissitudes of day and night. Lastly, think of yourselves, lately called into existence, and endued with minds capable of reasoning upon all these objects, and of discerning their relation as effects to their almighty, all-wise, and all-beneficent Cause and Author. Think of yourselves as admitted into this material universe, as into a vast temple, whose every part, as well as whole frame and structure, bespeaks the majesty and glory of the builder. Are you not awed by such a scene of wonders? In the view of them, does not your very

nature prompt you to reverence and adore this great Creator? Knowing that it is in him you live and move, that in his hand your breath is, and that his are all your ways, shall not his dread fall upon you? Will you not fear him, at whose rebuke “the earth trembleth, and the mountains flee away?” Knowing his will, is it conceivable that his rational creatures should venture to disregard his authority in any one of his commands? Must not his *fear* compel them to obey?

In cases of sudden and extreme danger, all men fly to God and implore his protection. Under such circumstances, nature forces men to think of God and seek to him. The most hardened despiser of prayer during the days of health and ease, is no sooner attacked by a painful and threatening illness, than he begins to pray, and even to solicit the prayers of others for him. Can you stand by the dying bed of a beloved relation or friend,—can you see him beyond all human aid, sinking into the grave, into eternity, and not lift up your soul to God on his behalf? And when you yourselves shall be in this situation, as you certainly will be, and may be very soon,—when all hope of life is gone, will you not then most fervently pray to that great Being, who has in his hand the disposal of your lot for eternity?

But, if you persist in the neglect of prayer through life, or while you enjoy health and prosperity; and at last, in a time of trouble or at the hour of death, have recourse to it as a refuge when every other

refuge is shut against you, can you rationally hope that such forced devotion will prove successful? There is an alarming and awful passage of Scripture, which I leave with you for your serious consideration. "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

SERMON VIII.

PROFESSING RELIGION.

ROMANS x. 10.

*For with the heart, man believeth unto righteousness ;
and with the mouth, confession is made unto
salvation.*

IN the verse immediately preceding, the terms of the gospel salvation are thus explicitly stated, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." As explanatory of this method of salvation, the words of the text are added, "for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." The full meaning of the text will be unfolded and brought into view, by ascertaining the import,

First, Of "believing with the heart unto righteousness ;" and then of "making with the mouth confession," or a profession of this faith, "unto salvation."

Our first inquiry is into the import of "believing with the heart unto righteousness." This comprises faith both in its objects and exercises. Its objects, or the things to be believed, are the truths revealed in the word of God. Many of these are discoverable by our own reason, contemplating the works of God, and reflecting upon them. The invisible things of him, even his eternal power and godhead are clearly seen, being understood or easily inferred from the things which he has made. The heavens declare his glory, the earth is full of his riches. We cannot open our eyes upon these his works, without beholding convincing proofs of his being, power, wisdom, and goodness; nor without witnessing the constant and universal agency of his providence; nor without from thence discerning our dependence upon and relation to him as his creatures, and in this way learning some of the duties and obligations resulting both from our relation to Him, and to one another, as partakers of one common nature. But these truths of natural religion are, by revelation, vastly extended and rendered more clear and convincing; and to them are added innumerable other truths, far surpassing the powers of human reason to discover.

From the word of God, we learn the history of the creation, of man, of his first or primeval state, of that into which he fell by transgression, the consequences of his fall, the mediatorial scheme devised for his recovery, its gradual developement from the

first promise of a Saviour, down to the period of his incarnation; his birth, life, doctrines, and miracles; his death, resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God as our advocate, pleading the atonement of his blood for the remission of our sins, his perfect righteousness for our justification, and the mission of the Holy Spirit to accompany the ministration of the Gospel for our conviction, conversion, and progressive sanctification, till we shall be made meet finally to be glorified together with him at the general resurrection. All the minor doctrines of the Gospel, connected with these its great leading principles, are among the objects of faith or the things to be believed. Some competent knowledge of these truths, of the general system of the Gospel, is a prerequisite to faith. For how can we believe truths of which we are ignorant? They must be apprehended by the understanding, in order to their having the consent of the will, the approbation of the judgment, and the love of the heart. Each of these is implied in their being "believed with the heart."

If they present themselves to us, claiming the authority of revelation, we call for the proofs of this authority. These proofs may be valid and sufficient, amply sufficient for the satisfaction of impartial and unbiassed minds; and yet fail of making any impression on minds preoccupied with the love of the world, and under bondage to divers lusts. An eye sound and healthy, easily distinguishes the objects presented to its vision, while no

optics will render those objects discernible by an eye diseased and covered with a film. The intellectual eye is dimmed and blinded by moral disease, by the corrupt propensities of the heart. The clearest and strongest evidence fails of attracting the attention of the careless, and of convincing the understanding of the prejudiced. Every day's experience shows us how backward and slow of heart men are to believe against their prepossessions, or in opposition to their interest or wishes; and this, whatever the subject may be, as well in religion as in politics, and even in matters of mere speculation. How often have we occasion to remark that facts, stubborn as they are in themselves, are found to be nothing when opposed to the march of party-spirit, and the highest probability to be less than nothing when standing in the way of passion or prejudice? All men, so far as they are sinners, and in proportion to the strength of sin in their hearts, are prejudiced against the religion of Christ, against both its doctrines and precepts.

As the great aim of this religion is, to turn them from sin to holiness, from the service of their lusts to that of God, it directly encounters all their depraved propensities, all the bulwarks of the world, the flesh, and the devil, within them. Its first and immediate demand upon them is, to deny themselves, to renounce their selfish views and desires, all their sinful indulgences, every habit of vice, every irregular affection, their pride, avarice, ambition, and

inordinate love of the world ; and, with broken and contrite hearts for their past alienation from God, to return to him as their chief and supreme good, and to serve him in newness of life—consecrating their whole selves to him for time and eternity, walking in all his ordinances and commandments blameless, and persevering in this course, growing in grace, pressing on towards perfection to the end of their lives;—all this, in hope of the mercy of God through Jesus Christ unto life eternal in a future world. Compliance with these requisitions is the import of “believing with the heart.” But what degree of evidence or of light exhibited to the understanding, will be sufficient to produce so great and thorough a change in the dispositions, views, affections, and pursuits of sinful men? In proportion as they love the works of darkness, they hate heavenly light, and shut their eyes against its beams. In some happy instances, however, the change mentioned is produced; but we are taught to believe, that, in each of those instances, it is effected by the Spirit of God co-operating with his word. When “faith comes by hearing,” the Lord opens the heart of the hearer, as he did that of Lydia, to receive and obey the truth. No force of reasoning, no strains of eloquence, no arts of persuasion will prove thus effectual, unless accompanied with a divine influence. Paul may plant, and Apollos water; but all will be in vain, unless it shall please God to give the increase. Faith, both in its principle and fruits, is his gift, and

is so acknowledged by as many as believe to the saving of their souls. When they thus differ from the impenitent and unbelieving world, from those who despise, wonder, and perish, or who make light of the gospel offers,—they owe the distinction to free, sovereign grace.

For this reason, all who desire or hope for salvation, while they earnestly seek the knowledge of God and his will, daily search and study his word, attend to its proofs and acquaint themselves with its contents, the things to be believed,—are directed to look, with supplicating eyes, to the great “Author and Finisher of faith,” by his spirit to work this grace in their hearts;—its principle, at first; and so to increase and strengthen it afterward, that it may become the governing spring of their lives. Their daily and most fervent prayer should be, “Lord, we believe,” or we desire to believe, “help thou our unbelief!” Perseverance in such a course of earnest seeking and praying never fails of issuing in that faith which is “unto righteousness,” that is, unto justification; for this is understood to be the meaning of believing unto righteousness. A true evangelical faith unites the soul to Christ, and, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, entitles it to share in the reward of his righteousness or in the benefits of his purchase, acquittance from condemnation through his atoning blood, and acceptance with God on account of his merits. Thus it is, that we pass from death unto life, from a state of sin and condem-

nation into a state of grace, and become heirs to life eternal.

But in order to the actual enjoyment of the promised inheritance, the *second* branch of the text teaches us the necessity of an explicit profession of our faith. "With the mouth, confession is made unto salvation." Into a world lying in ignorance and wickedness, and in danger of utter perdition, the infinite mercy of God has sent the religion of the Gospel to enlighten, reform, and save it. This unspeakable gift bears upon its face, the inscription, "peace on earth—good will to men;" an attestation from God that he wills all men to be saved, by receiving and obeying this religion. As many as do in their hearts receive and believe it, are required, according to their respective places, stations, opportunities, and abilities, to forward its progress by giving the utmost extent to the diffusion of its light, and the utmost effect to its authority and influence. Its establishment on earth and public profession among men, are intended as a testimony to all nations. Its professors are called the *salt* of the earth, with reference to their diffusing its savoury influence. They are also represented as a portion of *leaven*, appointed for the leavening of the whole lump or mass of their fellow-men; and as the *light* of the world, for spreading in every direction its cheering and vivifying beams. The church of Christ, composed of these professors, is "a city built upon a hill," that it may, on all quarters under the four winds of

heaven, attract the notice and guide the steps of hapless, bewildered wanderers into the way of life.

These being the declared views of the author and founder of our religion, you will consider, my hearers, whether secrecy and concealment be consistent with them, whether it can be lawful or excusable in any to dissemble their faith, or keep it close to themselves;—whether they may be permitted to put their light under a bushel, or to forbear declaring themselves on the side of that Saviour, in whom is all their trust for salvation. From the beginning, his cause has had many enemies, and has been, and still is, struggling against manifold obstacles. All the hearers of the Gospel are called, this whole assembly and each individual in it, openly to come forward to its support, lending it all the aid in their power. Will you, my hearers, shrink from this call? will you ask to be excused? will you urge other engagements? will you answer, “I have bought a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it; or five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them?” To the multitudes who attended upon Christ’s ministry when he was here on earth, he explicitly declared, “he that is not with me,” openly and perseveringly, “is against me,” and must expect to be regarded and treated as an enemy. You are aware that, at the time referred to, none could be openly for him without the danger, not only of being put out of the synagogue and losing their respectability in society, but of forfeiting their estates and even their

lives. At all these risks, however, they were required courageously and undauntedly to confess him; and this, as the condition of their being confessed and acknowledged by him in the presence of his Father at the last day. Nay, he added, and seems often to have repeated the declaration, at least, it is repeated three or four times in the gospels, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels." An awful stress is here laid upon our being above the love of popular esteem, and above the dread of public shame in our attachment to Christ and his religion. His denunciation ought to have alarmed those chief rulers, of whom it is said, "they believed on him, but, because of the Pharisees, did not confess him." Nor is it conceivable how any at this day can feel secure and satisfied of their safety, while, from any motives or under any pretences, they live in the neglect of a christian profession. If this neglect be occasioned by a feeling of indifference toward religion, or an habitual aversion to its duties, or a reluctance to part with their vices, to forego their sinful indulgences, or because they choose not to bind themselves to an exemplary and holy method of living,—must it not be, in itself, more culpable, and deserving of an heavier condemnation, than was that of those persons, who, in our Saviour's time,

kept their convictions to themselves through fear of the scorn and derision of their neighbours, or of the frowns and censures of their priests and rulers?

To all and every one who has an inward persuasion of the truth of the Gospel, Christ, by his word, now says, as with his own lips he did say, when he was here on earth, "Come unto me—take my yoke upon you," enter yourselves among my visible followers; assume my name and announce yourselves to be Christians. Go, tell the world that you are not ashamed either of me, or of my service, of my doctrines, or of my precepts. In the face both of my friends and enemies, declare your allegiance as the loyal and faithful subjects of my kingdom, as soldiers enlisted under my banners, ready, and determined at every hazard to abide faithful. Think not of the reproaches, nor yet of the temporal losses and dangers, which may be occasioned by such a profession. Formidable as these may seem, leave it with me to support and defend you, or ultimately to compensate whatever your fidelity to me may cost you. Let a display of this fidelity be your only concern. "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts," and, instead of affecting a kind of neutrality, instead of smothering your sentiments, hiding or disguising your belief—"be ready" always "to give an answer to every man who asketh you a reason for the hope which is in you."

To this openness, this fortitude, this magnanimity in the cause of Christ, ought not the authority

of his command to be a sufficient motive? Though we were wholly ignorant of the reasons for the command, yet should we not feel our obligations to obey? But if we consider the nature of his religion and our own nature as social beings, whose opinions, counsels, and examples are reciprocally influential; we cannot avoid discerning the reasonableness and importance of our taking an open and decided part in a cause so greatly and universally interesting. It is necessary to our own sincerity, to the honour of religion, and the general good of our fellow-men. Upon all subjects of general interest, we are accustomed to associate, in order that our combined efforts may more effectually promote the common weal. The success of every scheme for meliorating the condition of the public, correcting its opinions, reforming its manners, increasing its advantages, or securing its privileges—greatly depends upon the number, talents, and exertions of those who appear as the open and avowed advocates of the proposed reform. How could the revolution in favour of the liberties and independence of these United States have been effected, if each individual patriot, consulting his own personal ease and safety, had confined to his own bosom his patriotic opinions without daring to divulge them? How could the Protestant reformation from Popery have been brought about, if Luther, Calvin, and the other great reformers had not boldly come forward to that most hazardous, though glorious work? Nay, how

could the religion of Christ at first have been propagated in the world and spread among the nations, if his Apostles had declined the commission tendered them on account of the foreseen difficulties and dangers, persecutions and distresses, unavoidably attending its execution ?

My brethren, something of the same spirit displayed by them and the first Christians, is essential to the character of sincere Christians at all times. If we hope that the age of persecution has passed by, yet through every age the followers of Christ are forbidden a conformity to the course and fashion of the present evil world. By their whole deportment, they are to show that they are not "of the world," however much the world may hate them on that account. In imitation of their divine Master, it is incumbent upon them sternly to oppose the evil customs, the false maxims, the errors and vices of the times in which they live, stemming the torrent of general corruption, and holding forth to their contemporaries alluring examples of piety, benevolence, and weanedness from the world. In "making confession unto salvation," it is expected of them that they be seen walking as Christ walked, regular attendants upon each of his institutions, and conscientious observers of whatsoever things he has enjoined.

Admitting, my friends, that you customarily attend on the forms of public worship, its prayers, praises, and the ministry of the word ; so far it is

well. But is it your intention in doing these things that it should be understood that you are real Christians, under all the bonds of the christian covenant? Such a thought, perhaps, never entered your hearts. The Apostles preached to mixed assemblies, composed of Jews and Heathens. At the present day, the doors of the sanctuary are open for the reception of persons of all characters, whatever motives may bring them together. The ministers of Christ are glad of every opportunity for making known his gospel, and publishing its offers; but when any are persuaded in their hearts to receive and believe it, they are expected to make a public profession of their faith, and to seal this profession by washing with water in baptism, and by commemorating the death of their Saviour at his table. In this way were the primitive converts introduced, and made visible members of Christ's church. Neither he nor his Apostles acknowledged any as members, till they first openly acknowledged their faith in him. When the eunuch asked, "what doth hinder me to be baptized?" the answer was, "thou mayest, if thou believest with all thine heart." On his making this declaration, he was admitted to the ordinance.

All who received baptism in adult age, after the resurrection of Christ, united in the commemoration of his death. We have no example in Scripture of the neglect of this latter ordinance by any who had received the first. In every place, as many as

believed, hastened to profess their faith, and to form a church for the due celebration of all the gospel ordinances. The regulations for constituting christian societies, at first established by Christ and his Apostles, may not be set aside or disregarded. While we steadily observe the stated seasons for personal and family devotion and instruction in our own houses, we may not be less exemplary in our attendance upon the order and ordinances of God's house. If this be forsaken, what is called a pillar and ground for the support of the christian system, may be considered as giving way and sinking into ruin. When they who are called Christians, become remiss and negligent in assembling themselves together for christian worship and edification, the face of christianity is evidently fading away. But besides the performance of religious duties, our profession must be supported by a correspondent practice, by a temper and conduct conformed to the example and precepts of Christ. If it be not thus supported, evidenced, and shown to be real and sincere, it may be nothing, and worse than nothing. It is by an holy life, by the steady practice of all the christian virtues, that we are to cause our light to shine before others, bring honour to that holy name by which we are called, and contribute our part to the extending of the influence of his religion. Our example cannot fail of benefiting our immediate connexions, our families, children, relations, neighbours, acquaintance, indeed, all who have the opportunity of witnessing

how holily, righteously, and unblamably we pass the time of our sojourning here. Who knows to what an extent, or through what a length of duration, the happy effects of such examples may reach? May divine grace render us all earnest and fervent thus with our lives, as well as with our mouth, to make confession unto the salvation, both of ourselves and others, exhibiting us as leaders in the way to heavenly felicity!

SERMON IX.*

UNION IN CHRIST.

1 CORINTHIANS, xii. 27.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

AMONG the disorders and irregularities in the church at Corinth, which this epistle was designed to correct, were the prevalence of a party-spirit, and the mutual prejudices and animosities which it had produced. Notwithstanding the rich variety of gifts and graces with which this church was distinguished, parties and factions soon sprung up, divisions and contentions soon took place. The ground from which these disquietudes originated, seems to have been the persons, abilities, and gifts of the different teachers and ministers who came among them. These they set up as heads of parties, and indulged

*This discourse was delivered at Malden, Nov. 2d, 1794, on a Fast appointed for the purpose of seeking the Divine direction in the choice of a minister. It was afterwards preached in other places, with the omission of that part which immediately related to the abovementioned occasion.

their mutual prejudices, in unreasonably extolling one and depreciating another. With great concern St. Paul heard the tidings of these divisions, and; in the first chapter of this epistle, thus tenderly expostulates with them. “Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you;—every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ.” This use of party names and distinctions, is pronounced a mark of their carnality, and of their being under the influence of strong and sinful prejudices; “ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” that is, as unregenerate men, and not as Christians who have been taught and sanctified by that spirit, whose fruits are directly opposite to those works of the flesh. For while one saith, I am for this teacher, and another, I am for that, “are ye not carnal?” Aware of their having been betrayed into these divisions by their fondness for the eloquence and philosophy of their schools, and the more shining accomplishments of their different teachers, the Apostle reminds them of the little stress which ought to be laid upon these things, and that God often chooses and succeeds

ministers wholly destitute of all the graces of eloquence, and all the qualifications of worldly wisdom, thereby pouring contempt upon natural genius and abilities and human science, upon the learned scribe as well as the ostentatious “disputer of this world.” He brings to their recollection the manner of his own preaching, when he first made known to them the gospel of Christ. “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with the excellency of speech, or of wisdom—my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of men’s wisdom.” It consisted not in the lovely song of a fine address, or in the pomp of language and laboured charms of eloquence, “but in demonstration of the spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

Further to convince them of the unreasonableness of their introducing party names and distinctions, and setting up and contending for one christian minister in opposition to another, the Apostle says, “who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” The whole success is from above: how highly soever you may think of them, yet the ministers of Christ look upon themselves as nothing, or at most but us instruments in God’s hand; and the height of their ambition is to

be workers together with him. How absurd, then, is your zeal for one in opposition to another, your applause of one and slight and contempt of another, who is yet engaged in the same cause. For "he that planteth, and he that watereth are one." They are perfectly agreed in their views and attempts, having no separate aims; but are united in forwarding with their utmost abilities one interest and design,—co-operating with God in promoting your salvation. "For we are labourers together with God; ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's temple." By these comparisons, the unity of design carried on by all the friends of the Gospel is suggested. As in husbandry, many different operations conspire to the same end, namely, the increase of the field; and as in building, many hands are employed and different kinds of work are requisite in setting up and finishing an edifice; so in the church of Christ, in building the temple of the Lord, a diversity of operations, gifts, and talents are subservient to the same general design, and all in their respective places either necessary or useful. This idea is yet more strongly inculcated in the chapter which contains the text, where, by an allusion to the human body, Christians are urged to a mutual affection, sympathy, and tender care for one another. Among them, envy and strife, or mutual indifference and contempt, are represented as unnatural and monstrous, as it would be for the members of the human body to lose all sympathy and concern for each

other, and become at variance one with another. We have here a striking description of the wisdom and goodness of God, in so forming our body, that all its several parts conspire to one whole, and its various members and organs are so useful and necessary, that the most noble and important cannot look upon the meanest as redundant, being all so adjusted, that each one rejoices in its own situation, and in the addition and situation of all its fellow members, having one common interest and a mutual sympathy pervading the whole. Nor can there be the least alteration for the better in this construction of the body. Were the higher and more noble members to be depressed, or those in the lowest place to be exalted, the order, beauty, and usefulness of the whole would be deranged and rendered burdensome and monstrous. Having enlarged through a considerable part of the chapter upon this allegory, the Apostle in the text applies it to the purpose for which it had been introduced. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular," that is, each and all of you are so many individual members of the one mystical body of Christ, consisting of all true believers. The head is Christ himself; and as, in the human body, all the members are connected with the head, and are under its influence and control, by means of nerves, which, originating from the brain, branch forth into every part and organ, even into all the extremities, and are the channels of constant communication

and intercourse between the head and members ; so all the members of Christ are connected with him by a participation of his spirit, and a cordial subjection to his influence and control.

Of these members, the most honourable and important, as we are told in the verse following the text, are "first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers," and after these, they who, in the first ages of the church, were occasionally furnished with miraculous powers for healing diseases, distributing alms, preserving order and government, and speaking in divers tongues. Like the eyes, ears, hands, and feet in the natural body, these several offices and gifts were designed for the benefit of the church in general. Nor could each member equally share in them all without disorder and confusion. The most inferior members, however, by virtue of their relation to the body in general, would of course be benefited by them. In the advantages and privileges of the whole, each individual partakes. Every believer has reason to rejoice in the blessings and privileges of Christ's body, through the successive ages of the world. That part of the church which is already triumphant in heaven, and that which is still militant on earth, do both make but one body. Believers on earth are represented as belonging to the same community with the "general assembly in heaven." All among our fellow men on earth, who profess their subjection to the Gospel, acknowledging one body, one spirit, one hope of their calling,

one Mediator, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all—and whose lives and conversation do not contradict their profession—all who thus hold to these fundamentals of the Gospel, are to be received and treated by us as members of the same body with ourselves. Nor may they be excluded from our charity, though their sentiments upon each of the topics now mentioned should be different from our own. The injunction, “let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind,” clearly implies the right of private judgment, and that there may be, in consistency with a gospel sincerity, different persuasions among sincere Christians. To brotherly love and unity of spirit in the bond of peace, unity of opinion is by no means essential. It is the office of christian charity to condescend to the infirmities of the weak, to allow for the prejudices of education, to think candidly of those who differ from ourselves, and to extend to others the privilege which we claim for ourselves, that of governing our profession and practice, by our own and not another’s conscience.

Considering that we have all sinned, and must perish unless saved by the mere grace of God, is not our presumption wonderful in pretending that his grace must be limited to those who chance to see with our eyes, and comply with his revealed conditions as explained by us? What are we, guilty worms of the dust, that we should dare thus to interpose our judgment between God and our fellow Christians? By adopting such sentiments, we are

naturally led to conclude that we ourselves are certainly in the narrow way of salvation, while all who differ from us on points which we deem essential, are as certainly in the way to perdition ; and though we may pretend compassion for their souls, yet the thought will be always uppermost in our minds, that we are the reconciled friends of God, while they continue hostile towards him ; we, his adopted children, while they remain the children of the wicked one, from whom it becomes us to stand aloof and be separate—our tender consciences holding us back from all Christian friendship and fellowship with them.

Believe it, my friends, this is the true sectarian spirit, which has, by turns, marked the character of catholics and protestants of almost every description ; but it is not the spirit of Christ, nor of the Gospel of Christ. Its pride and bigotry show it to be most opposite to that gospel humility and charity which form the christian temper,—a temper that “vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, thinketh no evil, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” If we can believe the Apostle, these are the genuine fruits of the Spirit. The sectarian spirit against which I am speaking, originated the whole mass of church establishments, hierarchies, canons, creeds, confessions—all mere human inventions, wood, hay, and stubble ; nay, worse, so many vile shackles wickedly imposed upon the understandings and consciences of men. The consequences have been, the divisions

and animosities by which the Church of Christ has been torn and rent asunder, through each succeeding age down to the present times.

“To extend or deny our charity to others, according as they admit or reject our construction of the Scriptures, is no mark that we are impartial inquirers after truth. Christians may have respectful sentiments of each other, and have fellowship with one another, as having obtained like precious faith; they may love as brethren, and unite their endeavours for the advancement of the cause of their common Lord: they may be agreed in the vital parts of religion, consistently with great variety of opinion in regard to the form, and in the explication of some doctrinal points.” In a word, all and every one among all the different sects and denominations throughout christendom, who acknowledge Christ the Head, and appear to reverence his authority, and to be under the influence of his spirit, are undoubtedly to be considered and treated as his members, and as belonging to his mystical body. Among these there should be the constant exercise of mutual love and sympathy—as being members of one body.

But I pass on to show why the church is in the text called the body of Christ, or in what sense it is so. On various accounts, and in many different views, it appears to be peculiarly his;—his by purchase; for “He hath bought the church with his own blood.” He consented “to be made a curse

for us, that he might free us from the curse of the law," and reconcile us unto God by his cross. Thus he loved the church, and gave himself for it—washing us from our sins in his own blood, and purifying unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Are its members freed from the condemnatory sentence of the law, and restored to a state of acceptance with God? It is through Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to them who believe. Are their sins blotted out? It is for his sake, who has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Are they delivered from spiritual bondage, and rescued from the snares of the present evil world, and the power of Satan by whom they had been carried captive? They are made free by Christ, who "through death destroyed him that had the power of death." They are brought off conquerors over their spiritual enemies, through him "who loved them and gave himself for them." Do they pass from death unto life? It is through him who "tasted death for every man," and "died for all, that they who live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them." Is life eternal for them in store hereafter? This is expressly called the "purchased possession," on account of its being the reward of the Saviour's sufferings. It is the eternal redemption which he hath obtained, by offering himself without spot to God.

The church is also Christ's body, as it was formed at first by his own personal ministry, and by that

of his Apostles, and is still upheld and continued by the influence of his word and spirit. Its numerous members are by him drawn forth from the ruins of the apostacy. Out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation, they are collected and formed into one most excellent and happy society. From the darkness, error, and corruption of paganism were the Corinthians, and indeed all the Gentile Christians, at the first publication of the Gospel, brought forth into marvellous light and grace. The continual accession of new members from that day to this, is effected by the means which he has ordained. By his word and ordinances, through the disposals of his providence, and the influence of his spirit, men are still turned from darkness to light, and from the power of sin and Satan unto God.

But again, the church is Christ's body, as all its sincere members have been quickened and renewed by the efficacious influences of his spirit. "You hath he quickened," says the Apostle to the Ephesian Christians, "who were dead in trespasses and sins." They are also said to be "created anew in Christ unto good works; to be saved by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost; and by one Spirit to be all baptized into one body."

Do sincere Christians live and walk by the rules of goodness, righteousness, and truth? They are led into these happy paths by the Spirit which they have received. Do love, joy, peace, and longsuffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, and temperance

adorn their lives? All these are the fruits of the Spirit, which dwelleth in them.

But farther, the church is Christ's body, as he causes it to subsist under the same laws, faith, sacraments, and hopes, and holds it together by mutual charity, the bond of perfection. To all who would become members of this body, the same conditions are prescribed—repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. By this door every true member makes his entrance into the church. And when entered, all are bound to walk by the same rule, attend the same ordinances, perform the same duties of piety and devotion to God, practise the same virtues in their intercourse and dealings with men, and towards each other to feel a mutual sympathy as fellow members of the same body. Thus united under the same laws, they become entitled to the same privileges and hopes. The great and precious promises of the Gospel are their common treasure, from which each one derives his comfort and consolation. Having given this explanation of the church, or body of Christ, I proceed to point out some of the duties resulting from union to this body. And here,

First, Subordination among the members, and contentment every one with the office, calling, or condition in which Providence has placed him, are indispensably necessary. They cannot be all upon a level, nor have each one the same office and employment. Nor should this be matter of regret or dis-

quietude to any. The natural body does not consist of one member only, but of many members, which are adapted to various offices and ends; the foot has no reason to complain because it is not the hand, nor the ear because it is not the eye. In being what they are, the body is incomparably more perfect than it would be, if, instead of these members, it had another hand or another eye. In like manner the variety of gifts, offices, and conditions among the members of the church, conspire to the good of the whole. This variety is ordained by the same wisdom and goodness which arranged the members in our natural body, and ought therefore to induce a cordial acquiescence. As for God, his work is perfect, and all the disposals of his Providence are wise and gracious. Convinced of this, every one should feel satisfied, both with his lot in the world, and his station or office in the church, however inferior it may seem, compared with that of some others. Our main concern should be to acquit ourselves well in the places where we are fixed, and so to improve whatever gifts or talents may be committed to our trust, that we may contribute to the general weal. However narrow, comparatively, any one's sphere of usefulness may be, yet he is not on this account to indulge the suspicion that he belongs not to the body of Christ. He may not look upon himself as an outcast, merely because he is neither the eye nor the hand. His relation to the head depends not upon the eminence of his situation. The

most distant and inferior part may be animated by the same spirit and under the influence of the head. Though its usefulness and importance may not be so manifestly obvious, yet it is not to be despised or slighted by the higher and nobler parts. "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." Even those members, which are the most feeble, are yet necessary; and those, which are thought dishonourable and uncomely, should have their defects and blemishes covered by the mantle of charity. Hence,

Secondly, There should be a mutual sympathy and a reciprocation of kind offices among the members, each one exercising a tender care over its fellow. In the natural body there is no division of separate interests. The Author of nature has so constructed the human frame that all the members have the same care one for another; and so sensible and universal is their sympathy, that "if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." How strongly does this allusion, my brethren, inculcate upon us the importance of our being kindly affectioned one towards another! How forcibly should it restrain us from whatever may look like contempt in our carriage towards a fellow Christian! How cautious should we be of every word and action, that may tend to grieve the spirit, or hurt the feelings, or, which is yet worse, obstruct the usefulness of one, whom charity constrains us to view as a

brother in Christ! They, who eagerly take up an ill report against a professed disciple of Christ, or who wantonly ridicule, injure, or grieve his members, little consider what they do. They think not of the manner in which he will resent such offences. To him the weakest and feeblest of his people are dear and tender. He hath warned us that whoever injures them, touches the apple of his eye.

Thirdly, If we be all one body, and members one of another, with what studious concern should we endeavour to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bonds of love and peace? How watchful should we be against a party spirit, and whatever may tend to alienate our affections one from another, and bring on strife and contention? "Mark them who cause divisions among you," says the Apostle. In most societies there are some narrow, contracted minds, who have yet the vanity to set themselves up as the best judges of the general interest, and are so stiff and unyielding, that they are prone to sacrifice the common peace and happiness to their own prejudices, bigotry, or ill humour. How many societies have been ruined, and had all their affairs thrown into confusion by the prevalence of such a spirit. "A kingdom," says our Saviour, "divided against itself, is brought to desolation; and no city or house thus divided can stand." Such divisions however are unavoidable among those who are destitute of an accommodating temper, of mutual forbearance and condescension. But what can be

more disgraceful to professed Christians than defects of this kind? Among the Corinthians they were considered by the Apostle as marks of their carnality, and of a temper opposite to that charity, which the Gospel requires, and which is essential to the character of real Christians. True brotherly love inspires men with a degree of candour and liberality in judging one of another. It disposes them to bear with each other's infirmities, ignorance, and prejudices; to make every reasonable allowance for difference of opinion, and renders Christians more anxious to preserve peace and concord than to establish any speculative point, or carry each one his own favourite aim in opposition to the views of his brethren.

To you, my Christian friends, I would earnestly recommend this temper in all your proceedings with respect to your choice of a pastor. In obtaining a suitable person to be over you in the Lord, to lead in the public offices of religion, to open, explain, and apply the Scriptures, and discharge all the various duties of the christian ministry,—in obtaining a suitable person for this work, you undoubtedly feel yourselves greatly interested. It is in itself one of the most important transactions to which, as a Christian Society, you can be called to attend. When we contemplate the church as the body of Christ, formed and upheld by the influence of his word and spirit, and the means which he has ordained, and which his providence continually supplies, we are

strongly impressed with the propriety of seeking to Him by prayer for so rich a blessing as an able and faithful pastor. As the head of this body, we can have no doubt of his unremitting attention to its various wants. But he chooses to be inquired of by the house of Israel for the bestowment of whatever is necessary to their wellbeing. In the first age of his church he called and sent forth, in a way supernatural, labourers into his harvest. But as the occasion for these supernatural interpositions ceased, he, by the ordinary methods of his providence, has continued a succession of pastors and teachers in his church. By his blessing on the means of education and the gracious influence of his spirit on the hearts of the children of the church, he has from time to time raised up of her sons for prophets, and of her young men for Nazarites. These at the present day are as really his gift, as were the prophets and apostles of old. By his providence and grace they are furnished and disposed for the service of the sanctuary. And when a particular church or society unite in their choice of a suitable candidate for the ministry, the superintending influence of his providence guides all the circumstances of the event. By him the parties are led into so important a connexion. And if we ought to acknowledge him in all our ways, it is especially incumbent in so weighty a concern as the choice of a minister. That all our steps in such an affair may be directed by him, should be the ardent desire of our hearts.

But in order to a well grounded hope of this, it is necessary that our application to the throne of grace be attended and followed with the exercise of that christian temper towards each other, which is suitable to our mutual relation as members of Christ's body. If we forget the duties resulting from this relation, we shall forfeit the favourable regards of the great Head of the church. Hereby we are to approve ourselves his true disciples, his real members, by our love one towards another. By the preservation of this temper, by mutual condescension and studying the things that make for peace, we may hope for his continued protection and the special guidance of his providence in every weighty concern.

My Christian friends, there may, perhaps, be some difference in your sentiments on certain articles of our common faith. And there may be a yet greater difference in your opinions of those who appear among you as candidates for the ministry. Of the trouble and disquietude arising from this source other parishes have had melancholy experience. Some, perhaps, who once rejoiced in the success of their exertions, in opposition to their brethren, have afterwards regretted that success, and found the advantage more than balanced by the disadvantages consequent upon the loss of peace and unanimity. Let it therefore be a settled point with you all, not to hazard any such experiment. Resolve, if possible, to be generally united in your proceedings. In order to this, let those who think themselves most

opposite to each other, lay their account to give up, on both sides, the extreme of their wishes. Who, among all the sects and denominations throughout Christendom at the present day, can be supposed to entertain opinions comparably so grossly erroneous, as were those of the first Christians, who “retained a religious reverence for idols?” Yet we have seen that towards these the spirit of charity was explicitly enjoined by the Apostles. Did we ourselves possess the same charity, should we think of *cutting off* from our Christian fellowship, those of our brethren who understand the Scriptures in a sense somewhat different from us? The presumption, pride, and bigotry of such conduct appear to me more culpable than almost any conceivable mistakes in theory and speculation can be. To such Christians (if Christians they can be called) evidently applies what our Saviour said to his disciples, when calling for fire from heaven,—“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.” Precisely the same spirit displayed by them on that occasion, predominates in all who, from a persuasion of the truth of their own tenets, become confident, dogmatical, and censorious towards their brethren. By mutual condescension the most distant may be brought to unite. And if truth and right be your aim, these are rarely, if ever, found on any extreme. By the heat of controversy, and the zeal of parties, men are transported beyond the happy medium of truth and duty. Shun, I beseech you, all party names and distinctions, and be not

over confident on any point of theory or speculation. Christianity is a practical science. It consists in temper and practice, rather than in sentiment and *profession*. None of its doctrines are of importance any farther than as they influence the heart and affections. And would Christians learn to consider them in this light, they would find but little occasion to dispute about them. On speculative points, all are liable to err. The most accomplished and judicious divines, after a life of study and inquiry, are but learners in the school of Christ. They are not perfect in knowledge, nor infallible in their opinions. In receiving some things as important truth, they have often embraced a shadow, or the figment of their own imaginations. Thus man, at his best estate in this world, is a weak, imperfect, fallible being! And all his speculations, the discourses which he may deliver, and the books which he may write, are, like their author, imperfect. Of course, all systems of divinity, creeds, and forms of faith, compiled by uninspired men (though the most wise and learned of the age in which they lived), are to be viewed as probably containing a mixture of error. None of them all is to be regarded as the standard of truth, nor made a criterion for trying the sentiments and qualifications of candidates for Christian communion, or for the Christian ministry. Let it not, my brethren, lessen a candidate in your esteem, if he disclaims every test of this kind. They ought to be spurned at, when thus presumptuously

obtruded into the place of the *law* and the *testimony* which Christ has given us. As Protestants, we can consistently have no other test but the Bible. In this is contained the whole of revealed religion. It teaches us all, both ministers and people, what to believe and what to do. By this we are to be guided in forming our principles and in regulating our practice. It is the only sufficient rule, both of faith and of practice. We should learn to judge for ourselves, and use the reason which God has given us in examining his word and searching its import. A mind, thus uncontrolled by human decisions, is honorary to Christians in general, and especially to ministers and candidates for the ministry.

In order to your coming to a choice, you must, my brethren, of course judge of the qualifications of candidates. But let me exhort you to judge by Scripture rules. It is of the first importance, that the object of your choice be indeed a member of Christ's body—a Christian in temper and practice, as well as profession. In judging of this his sincerity, the reality of his religion, let the rule laid down by our Saviour be your guide:—"By their fruits ye shall know them." If his moral character be fair and unblemished; if he hath feared God from his youth, and has an established reputation for piety, benevolence, and sobriety;—with this you ought to be satisfied. Your next inquiry will be, whether he possesses those abilities, natural and acquired, which are requisite in order to his discharging the duties of

the ministry with becoming dignity, and so as to answer the important purposes of the institution. In the sacred writings, these are marked with sufficient precision for your direction. He must not be a novice, but mighty in the Scriptures—a Scribe, well instructed in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God—able from his treasures, accumulated by reading, meditation, and prayer, to bring forth, for the edification of his charge, things new and old, to feed them with knowledge and understanding. He should also possess those talents for communication which are implied in being “apt to teach.” It may not perhaps bring any reflection upon your wisdom and good sense, nor be dishonorary to your Christian character, if this church and society should agree in choosing a candidate who possesses these *general* qualifications of an useful minister. You may lawfully covet the best gifts; but they who are over nice and difficult to be suited, do not always make the wisest choice. I heartily wish you, my beloved brethren, the Divine presence and direction in all your affairs, and that it will please the God of the spirits of all flesh to set a man over the congregation, and to unite your hearts in the choice of one who will naturally care for you, and who may prove a rich blessing to you and to your children after you. Finally, brethren, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

SERMON X.

HUMILITY.

1 PETER v. 5.

God resisteth the proud; and giveth grace to the humble.

IN the former part of the verse, young persons are exhorted to a respectful and submissive behaviour towards their seniors in age, or superiors in office and station. Yea, all are enjoined, by mutual condescension, to promote the general peace and unity. In order to this, an humble temper is recommended as of the highest importance. "Be clothed with humility," says the inspired writer. To quicken their endeavours after so necessary and ornamental a virtue, he adds, "For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

To each one of us, my hearers, the grace and favour of God is, of all other things, the most needful and important. How to obtain it, should be our great inquiry. The words of the text are an important direction to those who would successfully seek heavenly grace. They warn us of the disappoint-

ment which will attend all the religious attempts of the proud and self-sufficient; while they set before us an assured prospect of success to those of an opposite character. God will set himself, according to the import of the word in the Greek, as in battle array against the proud, but to the humble his grace and favour will be readily extended. How forcibly should this consideration deter us from whatever savours of a proud and arrogant temper, and induce us to humility in our whole deportment! To illustrate this grace, distinguishing it from its opposite vice, and recommending it to the practice of all, especially of young persons and those who are entering on a life of religion, is the design of the present discourse.

Humility, my brethren, holds so distinguished a place in the Gospel scheme, and is so essential to the Christian character, that whoever has aspired to a reputation for extraordinary sanctity among the followers of Christ, has usually made great pretensions to this grace. The show of it has been held forth by multitudes who were destitute of the reality. No other grace of the Gospel, perhaps, has been more frequently, or more artfully counterfeited than this. The wild enthusiast, the furious bigot, and the vile impostor, have all endeavoured to appear to the world under the cloak of humility. The laborious ceremonies and unnatural rigours of the cloister, while they are submitted to as marks of great self-denial and deep abasement, have frequently been accompanied with the spirit of vainglory,

and proved subservient to the solemn impostures of a sanctimonious pride. At best, they belong to that "voluntary humility," which the Apostle censures as consistent with a "fleshly mind vainly puffed up." In the same light we are also to view an affected negligence in dress, singularity of manners, an assumed dejection of countenance, degrading and unmanly submissions, the needless stooping to mean and servile offices, and all great professions of self-abasement. These things, which so frequently pass with the undiscerning multitude for marks of uncommon humility, are really no other than the baits which hypocritical pride is daily throwing out to catch applause. It is really wonderful that arts which have been practised so long, and were carried to the utmost length by the self-righteous hypocrites in our Saviour's time, should still retain so much of their efficacy. They are easily detected and seen through by a judicious observer of characters. They who in conversation affect to speak meanly of themselves, cannot always suppress their uneasiness and disappointment when they find that they are not contradicted by others. Notwithstanding all the hard things which they say of themselves, they cannot brook the least censure from their neighbours. "One of the proudest men I have ever known," says an ingenious writer, "and who could the least endure to be charged with any imperfection, was perpetually exclaiming, in a lamentable tone, against the degeneracy of the world and the depravity of

the heart." All great professions of any particular virtue or estimable quality, are always suspicious.

Genuine humility is the most unprofessing of all virtues. It avoids all those words, gestures, and appearances of self-abasement, which might draw the attention and praise of men. But this virtue is not inconsistent with a proper sense of our own rights, or with a rational and manly claim of whatever may be our due by the laws of society, or in consequence of our station, rank, or situation in the community, by virtue of those becoming decencies and fitnesses which humanity and civilization have established. In a temperate and becoming manner, it will dispose us to resist every degradation which might tend to obstruct our usefulness or lessen our influence.

When we think of God, of his greatness, his holiness, and perfection; humility will cause us to feel and to acknowledge our own insignificance, unworthiness, and aggravated guilt. Before him, we shall feel ourselves to be sinful dust and ashes, unable to look up to him, or on any occasion to address him, but as covered with shame and confusion of face. With respect to our fellow-men, humility "recognises that equality of right and obligation, which, according to the diversity of relations and circumstances, subsists among all mankind, but also admits and respects every occurring instance of merit in any individual."

It requires both a sound judgment and no small degree of moderation and firmness, to repress the

impulses of self-love in such a manner as to give to our own qualities no more value than they ought in reason to possess. So difficult is this attainment, that it may be doubted whether it has been ever completely possessed by any character merely human. To yield to the suggestions of pride, to suffer the imagination to be filled with her fantastic images, and the understanding to be blinded by her fascinations, requires no exertion, no abilities whatever. The weaker, the more ignorant and vicious a person is, the more easily he runs the course which his passions prescribe. But the cultivation of humility is a work that demands great discernment of the respective claims of those that surround us; the faculty of comparing them with our own, a judicious estimation of merit, and resolution to bend the violence and obstinacy of selfish passions to the nature and reason of things. These energies of mind, and their effects on conduct, command esteem, ensure benevolence and attachment, and evince a character not only amiable in itself, but useful to mankind. Every thing social, generous, and exalted, is much more to be expected from this than from the opposite disposition. Is any personal hardship to be suffered, any sacrifice to be made for the public good? The person who considers himself as unimportant, in comparison with the social body, will be more ready to exhibit such instances of magnanimity, than he whose chief object is his own exaltation. Is it necessary for the peace or wellbeing of the community,

to withdraw from a party, to abandon a favourite enterprise, to give up a darling project, tenet, or pursuit, or to forbear pressing either of these to the disquietude, grief, or injury of others? There will be little difficulty, in most cases, in obtaining such concession or condescension from the man who is diffident of his own judgment, from an habitual consciousness of his imperfection; but from him whose pride of heart or of understanding attaches infallibility to his own opinions, what can be expected?

The true nature of humility is marked with great exactness by St. Paul in Romans xii. 3. where with peculiar solemnity he admonishes every one "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly." Pride consists in self-exaltation, in arrogating to itself excellencies, virtues, and accomplishments of which it is really destitute; in beholding through a magnifying glass those which it may seem to possess, putting an exorbitant value upon them, and claiming from others a respect and homage to which it has no just title. So strong is the propensity of the depraved heart to some or other of these emotions of pride and vanity, that few men are to be found, who are wholly free from them. Even the accidental advantages of birth, person, or fortune, give a surprising elation to some minds. They prefer themselves to others, and assume airs of superiority on the mere possession of things, which, in themselves, confer no merit.

Worldly honours, riches, and power, in whatever way and by whatever means they have been obtained, do yet almost universally minister to the pride of the possessors. They are attended with such weight and consequence in the affairs of the world, that the proud and aspiring have their eye constantly upon them, as the ultimate scope of their desires and pursuits.

These, however, are not the only objects on the possession of which men are accustomed to plume themselves. There are various other things which serve as fuel to pride. Graceful accomplishments, shining talents, and splendid actions, are thought a plausible pretence for self-exaltation. Whoever excels in any art, profession, or science, and becomes distinguished for his superior improvement, is in danger of being unduly elated with the encomiums of his admirers. Not only natural, civil, and intellectual distinctions, but moral qualities and religious attainments, either real or fancied, frequently become the occasion of pride. And this of all other kinds of pride, is perhaps the most dangerous, and the least excusable. Among the pretenders to religion, however, instances of it frequently occur. The church of Christ, at no period since its first establishment, has been wholly free from those false brethren, or weak and imperfect Christians, whose knowledge, gifts, influence, or station in the house of God, have tended to puff them up. Into this condemnation of the devil, the

Apostle describes novices in religion, as peculiarly liable to fall. Among the primitive Christians, there were not a few who put too high a value upon the distinctions which they enjoyed, and were prone to indulge too great a degree of self-complacency. Amidst the profusion of extraordinary gifts which in that age were bestowed upon the church, some were abused to the purposes of pride and vainglory. Gifts which excited the admiration and applause of the multitude were ardently coveted. Too many sought their own reputation and honour by the display of them. Hence originated those vain boastings,—that vaunting of false gifts, or unduly extolling such as might be real,—and consequently those envyings, disputings, and divisions, which the holy Apostles in most of their Epistles endeavour, with so much concern and earnestness, to correct and reform.

In writing to the church at Corinth, after enumerating all the most splendid and wonderful gifts, St. Paul brings into view something which he pronounces to be far more excellent, necessary, and important, namely, that charity which always includes, and never ceases to exhibit true humility,—“which envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, becometh not unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” Without this inward principle, he solemnly assures them, that no gifts whatever,

whether of miracles, tongues, or prophecy, no outward display of alms, no extent of knowledge, nor any height of zeal, though it should encounter martyrdom, will prove of any avail towards their final acceptance with God. He would not, indeed, be understood as depreciating spiritual gifts; yet he teaches them that the value of these, and of every other accomplishment, is to be estimated by its usefulness. For himself, he declares that though he excelled them all in the gift of tongues, yet, in a christian assembly, he had rather speak five words to the edification of his brethren, than ten thousand in those various unknown languages, of which they were so ambitious. Instead of thinking themselves each one to be better than his neighbour, they are exhorted to prefer others to themselves. They are reminded that, if any man thought himself to be something, when he was nothing, the danger and misery of such a self-deception would be of his own procuring; and that if any among them seemed to be wise, and entertained such an opinion of himself, it would be necessary for him to lay aside this conceited wisdom, and become a fool in his own estimation, in order to his attaining to true wisdom. Of all other delusions, that surely is incomparably the most dangerous, which consists in believing that we have passed from death unto life, while in reality we are yet in our sins, in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. But through the illusions of self-love, of pride, and vanity, multitudes are thus

deceived. How heavy is the charge which our Saviour himself brings against the church in Laodicea. "Thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

If, my hearers, in the age of miracles, the days of inspiration, at the first promulgation of the Gospel, when converts to it were under the immediate guidance of infallible teachers, and received special messages immediately from heaven—if in these purest and best times of the church, so many of its members were deficient in true humility, and, through the pride and vanity of their hearts, were liable to such great and dangerous mistakes concerning themselves; how much does it concern us, in these degenerate days, to watch and pray against a sin, to which our nature is so exceedingly prone! What reason for apprehension is there! What ground for jealousy over ourselves! With what vigilance should we keep our hearts, and guard them against the entrance of pride! With what solicitude should we cultivate the opposite virtue; and cherish in ourselves humbleness of mind, a meek and lowly disposition! While "they who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight," assume to themselves abilities, virtues, and accomplishments which they have not; and elated with these imaginary excellencies, aspire at things too high for them; humility will effectually preserve us from these self-deceptions,

by teaching us impartiality in judging of ourselves. Under the influence of this grace, we shall be cautious of overrating any of our talents, privileges, or attainments. Though it will not divest an upright man of the comfort resulting from the testimony of a good conscience ; yet, sensible of the deceitfulness of the heart, it will incline him to examine himself with a suspicious severity. He will look, not merely on the bright side of his character, but on those frailties and failings which attend even his best actions. Conclusions in his own favour, from this complete survey of himself, will be expressed with diffidence rather than with confidence. He will continue to see so much amiss in his temper, views, affections, conversation, and practice, from day to day, as will render it impossible for him, at any time, to be fully satisfied with himself. This habitual sense of his own infirmities and defects, will preserve the meek and lowly frame of his mind. Whatever of good he may have done, he ultimately refers to the original fountain whence all is derived. No degree or extent of usefulness, nor the praises of others, will induce him so far to forget himself, as not to acknowledge by whom, and through whom, the whole has been performed. With the warmest gratitude, he will still say with the Apostle, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." With sentiments like these, my hearers, humility inspires the greatest and best of men in the review of those parts of their lives, which have been most praiseworthy. These

humble views of themselves add no small lustre to all their other excellencies. Indeed, they are inseparable from every truly good and worthy character.

But my principal aim in this discourse, is to recommend humility to those who wish to succeed in their endeavours after religious attainments, and in seeking the grace and favour of God. Many, alas! fatally miscarry in these attempts. They seek "to enter in at the strait gate," and are not able. Pride is the greatest and most general obstacle. "God resisteth the proud." Against them, his word and spirit, his providence and grace are all opposed. While this is the predominant temper or character of any, it is not possible for them to be on terms of favour with that Being, "who knoweth the proud afar off," and never admits them to the nearness and intercourse of friendship with him. They who pretend to seek, to ask, or to knock, with proud and unhumbléd hearts, will do all in vain. Their very inquiries after God, and attempts to improve in the knowledge of him, will not succeed. Such characters are, and forever must be, in a state of estrangement and alienation from him.

But though pride be thus dangerous, and, in numberless instances, fatal, yet it is a sin which steals upon us unperceived. On every occasion, and in almost every action, we are liable to its influence. Self-love inclines us to think well of ourselves. Under its bias, we are prone to lay hold on every circumstance which can encourage or justify our

inward complacency. To our faults and follies, our failings and imperfections, we are wilfully blind, or we unreasonably extenuate and excuse them, while we as unreasonably magnify whatever may seem to be in our favour. All our seeming excellencies are compared with the apparent defects of our inferiors around us. The advantage in our favour confirms and heightens the ideas of our own merit. We eagerly drink in the commendations of others. We listen to the compliments of our friends, and will not allow ourselves to suspect that they are undeserved. In this way, and by these means, how easy and almost unavoidable is self-deception! Before we are aware, we may fall under the dominion of pride and vanity. What numbers among the professors of religion do thus deceive themselves! Compassing themselves about with sparks of their own kindling, and resting in their fancied attainments, they content themselves with the hypocrite's hope.

When a young person is awakened to pay greater attention to the things of religion, than is usual among his companions, and becomes distinguished for a religious character; unless this awakening issues in a real change of heart, in true repentance and humiliation, there will be the utmost danger of his being lifted up with spiritual pride. Having abstained from the vices and immoralities to which he sees some others addicted, and performed duties neglected by them, he will soon begin to reflect upon himself with peculiar satisfaction, and grow

delighted with his own character and attainments. If his constitution and the state of his nerves render him susceptible of enthusiastic impressions and impulses, there is no height to which he may not ascend in his own opinion of himself. In this stage of his progress, after having been favoured with what he deems supernatural discoveries, he may think it not right that his light should be hid under a bushel—that the world should miss of the benefit of his gifts and experiences. His ambition may lead him to wish that others should think as highly of him as he does of himself. To attract their notice, acquire importance, and excite admiration, all his abilities will be displayed. By a ready utterance, great confidence, and bold assertions, he may, in time, attain to the distinction which he seeks—he may become the oracle of the weak, the ignorant, and the superstitious. Their esteem and applause will strengthen his pride and presumption, and confirm him yet more in the belief of his own attainments. Thus bolstered up in his self-esteem, what is to be expected from him? He has already more understanding than all his teachers, or, as Solomon expresses it, “is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.” Wedded to his own opinions, fancies, and notions, from a persuasion that he cannot be mistaken, it is in vain to reason with him. He is confident, dogmatical, and censorious. He may be a papist or a protestant, a presbyterian or congregationalist, an anabaptist or a

quaker ; but he is not a Christian, for he wants humility. He may be in favour with men like himself ; but in the divine favour he has no part, for “ God resisteth the proud.” To him the kingdom of heaven belongs not, for our Saviour has expressly assigned it to “ the poor in spirit ;” and that he is, of all men, the most unlikely to be reduced to this poverty of spirit, is strongly intimated in that saying of Scripture, “ Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit ? there is more hope of a fool than of him.” “ Publicans and harlots,” said our Saviour to the conceited Pharisees, “ go into the kingdom of heaven before you.”

My young friends, I ardently wish you and all others to be earnestly engaged in religion. I would hope that some of you are indeed entering upon a religious course. But let me entreat you to set out right. It is reported, that “ what Demosthenes said of action in an orator, Augustine has applied to humility in a Christian. Being asked what was the first thing in religion, he answered, ‘ humility ;’ what was the second, he again answered, ‘ humility ;’ and what was the third, he still replied, ‘ humility.’ In a word, he looked on this evangelical grace, as the basis of all the rest.”

Begin, therefore, with this, as the foundation of your religious qualifications and character. “ God heareth not sinners.” One reason is, because that in all sin there is pride, a setting up of our own inclinations, propensities, and humours in opposition

to the wisdom and authority of God. Humility, then, is the first step in our return to him, and in the way to reconciliation with him. It is essential to repentance, and a ceasing from sin. "The spirit of the humble, and the heart of the contrite ones," mark the same character. Would you return to God and seek his favour? This disposition must result from a conviction of the folly and guilt of your departure from him. It must excite you to humble your souls before him, on account of those manifold offences and aggravated provocations with which you stand chargeable in his sight. Open your eyes, then, to a just view of yourselves; of your ignorance, impotence, sinfulness, misery, and danger. Do you need the assisting grace of Heaven to recover you from this undone condition? Be assured that the deeper your sense is of this your need, the better prepared will you be to receive, and the more likely will you be to obtain assistance from above. "For God giveth grace to the humble." When they shall be thus qualified, by his word and spirit he will lead them on in the paths of righteousness, he will strengthen them against temptations, support them under trials, guide them by his counsel and grace whilst here, and receive them to glory hereafter. Though heaven be his throne, and the earth his footstool; though he be the high and lofty One, inhabiting eternity, and dwelling in light unapproachable; yet to this man will he look, even to

him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at his word—with him also will he dwell, to revive the heart of the humble, to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

SERMON XI.

CONTENTMENT.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 11.

*For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am,
therewith to be content.*

CONTENTMENT with our worldly condition and circumstances is an important branch of the Christian temper, a noble attainment in the divine life, after which we should be always striving. Each of us should be able to adopt the language of the Apostle. What he had so happily learned, the Gospel requires us to learn. In the subsequent discourse, therefore, it is proposed to describe its nature, and give some directions for its attainment.

The word in the original Greek, rendered *content* in the text, imports *self-sufficient*; but this, in its strict sense, pertains to the self-existent Being only, and can be understood of no creature considered abstractedly from Him in whom all fulness dwells. St. Paul's assertion is not to be taken in this sense. On the contrary, it is with reference to his interest

in God and expectations from him, that he declares himself satisfied in any condition. God and his providence are the ground of his self-sufficiency or satisfaction. He elsewhere thus explains his meaning, "Our sufficiency is of God." Having God for his portion, and receiving all his supplies from the divine bounty, he declares himself full and satisfied with any measure of temporal good allotted him by his heavenly Master, whether it be greater or less, abounding or scanty. This seems to be the obvious import of his assertion, the contentment to which he had attained. He had lately received a generous donation from the church at Philippi, which he gratefully acknowledges; but at the same time assures them, that he rejoices in it, not so much on account of its relieving his personal necessity, as on account of its being a proof of their regard for the Gospel, and of the happy fruits produced by his preaching among them. He wishes them not to infer from his present expressions of thankfulness, that he had been unhappy, or impatient of the straits and difficulties to which he had been subjected before the reception of their bounty. "I speak not," says he, "in respect to want; for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and how to abound. In every place and in all conditions, I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I am sufficient for all things through Christ

who enables me.” Here again you will observe that Christ is the basis upon which he rests all his sufficiency and satisfaction. As united to him and deriving from him all his present supplies and future hopes, no temporal changes, whether in themselves prosperous or adverse, greatly move him, or disturb the inward composure and tranquillity of his mind. To the ancient philosophers of Greece and Rome this source of human felicity seems to have been unknown; yet it is certain that the temper here exhibited by the Apostle, is a qualification essentially necessary to the true happiness of a rational, moral being. Without contentment, such a being cannot be happy in any situation. Of what avail are all the means of enjoyment to that man, whose state of mind is such as renders him incapable of deriving any satisfaction from them. This is undoubtedly the case, to a great degree, with all those who are strangers to the exercise of piety, and destitute of its principles. Insensible of the hand of God in the events which befall them and in the vicissitudes which they experience, they can find no arguments sufficient to quiet the tumult of their thoughts and passions when they meet with crosses and disappointments.

Such persons may have no spiritual anxieties, they may be at ease about their souls and the concerns of eternity. In the school of sin and Satan, they may have learned in whatever state they are with respect to God and another world, therewith

to be easy and unconcerned. But this is so far from being rational or commendable, that it is a mark of the most sottish stupidity and most dangerous self-delusion. The Scripture denounces the heaviest wo against those who are thus at ease in Zion. All its warnings and threatenings are intended to awaken and rouse men from this thoughtless state, this spiritual lethargy.

Nor does it become any professed Christian to rest satisfied with his present religious attainments. It is characteristic of all real Christians, while they continue in this state of imperfection, to be always striving after higher degrees of holiness. St. Paul, while perfectly easy about his temporal interests and worldly condition, says, with reference to his spiritual concerns, "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling."

This more just estimate of things unseen and eternal, and proportionably greater concern about them, will naturally tend to lessen our anxiety, and render us, in a measure, indifferent with respect to our temporal interests. The latter, being of so short and precarious duration, will be regarded as next to nothing by a mind deeply impressed with the weight and infinite importance of its future and everlasting state. Its thoughts, its hopes and fears, being chiefly occupied and exercised upon this, it will easily submit to any present incon-

veniences, privations, or sufferings, which the Divine wisdom may appoint for its trial and discipline.

My hearers, till we shall become sensible to the worth of eternal things, we shall continue to overrate things temporal, and of course be liable to an improper and culpable solicitude about them. While the comforts and enjoyments of the present world, its riches, honours, and pleasures, are regarded as the chief good, as our most valuable treasure; our minds must be necessarily agitated, elated or depressed according to the ever variable aspect of our worldly affairs. Our judgment of these things must be wholly reversed, and different and opposite sentiments of worldly good must be entertained, before we can hope to learn true contentment. In hope of that eternal life which the Gospel sets before us, we must comply with its conditions, be thus reconciled to God, cordially yielding ourselves up to obey his precepts and to submit to his allotments;—in our habitual temper we must be thus conformed to his will, before we can enjoy that inward peace and tranquillity which are the portion of his children. Before his conversion to Christianity, St. Paul himself had been a stranger to that contented mind which is expressed in the text. It was in the school of Christ that he learned this happy lesson.

If, like him, we imbibe the spirit and adopt the principles of the Gospel, these will naturally lead us, as to all other virtues, so to this of con-

tentment with our condition in special. I mean not, that christian piety will render us insensible either to the good or evil things of the present state, or supersede or suspend a prudent care, or any suitable endeavours for obtaining the one, or escaping the other. It will, in fact, from a principle of conscience, render us steady and diligent in these cares and pursuits, while at the same time it will free us from those restless anxieties with which they are too generally attended. Having planned and conducted our affairs in the manner which we had judged most prudent, should we fail of success, we shall know that our disappointment is the will of our heavenly Father, and our habitual submission to him will still preserve the peace and tranquillity of our minds. We are allowed to seek and conditionally to pray, not only for the necessaries, but for the comforts and conveniences of life ; but if the supreme Disposer sees fit to withhold them from us, or to withdraw them after they have been in our possession, a principle of duty towards him will restrain all the emotions of discontent. We know that there is no want either of wisdom or goodness in him, and that all things are right and best as ordered by him. This conviction is a firm ground for contentment and satisfaction in every condition. Thus persuaded, we shall in patience possess our souls upon every occasion, and under whatever circumstances we may be placed.

It is an observation of the ingenious Addison, that "there never was a system, besides that of Christianity, which could effectually produce contentment in the mind of man." Among the numerous sages and philosophers of antiquity, some tell us that our discontent only hurts ourselves, enhances and aggravates our sorrows, without effecting the least alteration in our circumstances ; others, that whatever evils befall us, proceed from that fatal necessity, that eternal, irresistible destiny, from which the gods themselves have no exemption ; while others, again, very gravely assure the man in misery, that his sufferings are necessary to keep up the general order and harmony of the universe, and that they could not be precluded without deranging the great scheme of providence and incurring the danger of general confusion and disorder. If these and similar considerations serve to silence complaint, they can afford no satisfaction to the sufferer. If they convince him of the unreasonableness of his discontent, still they are far from removing it or alleviating its pain. Instead of bringing consolation or suggesting hope, they minister nothing but despair. To all arguments of this kind, applies the answer which Augustus Cæsar is reported to have made to his courtiers when attempting to assuage his grief for the death of a beloved friend, by telling him, that his tears and lamentations were fruitless and unavailing, as they could not bring back the de-

ceased. "It is for that very reason that I grieve," exclaimed the agonized emperor.

Christianity, my brethren, bears a more tender regard to the feelings of human nature. It addresses the sufferer in more soothing accents, and opens to him a door of hope. It assures him that the bearing of his afflictions as he ought will have a natural tendency to bring about the removal of them. It makes him easy here, by showing him how happy he may become hereafter, and how much that happiness may be increased by the right improvement of his present troubles. It teaches him that by patience and submission, by restraining and subduing his present inordinate desires, all his desires will hereafter become regular and be completely and forever gratified.

But, to be more particular in defining the nature of contentment, I observe that it consists,

First, in bringing our minds to our condition, and thus limiting our desires. If the latter be unrestrained, it is plain that they can never be satisfied. Exorbitant desires are the great source of perpetual discontent. A comfortable subsistence, convenient food and raiment, may be lawfully desired; but if your desires rise beyond these, and impetuously crave the objects of pride, luxury, and vanity, you may be assured that no acquisitions whatever will satisfy them. Avarice, pride, and ambition are, in their own nature, insatiable. Many of those who seem the most uneasy and dis-

contented with their present condition, are prone to imagine, that, could they attain to what is possessed by some of their neighbours, it would be the competency with which they would be satisfied. But experience universally shows, that when people have been thus succeeded, and risen to what they once thought would be the height of their ambition, new objects present themselves, other and different prospects open before them, new wants and contrivances start up, and inflame their desires afresh; and they continue their pursuits with as much eagerness and impatience as ever; nay, it often happens, that their desires have so strengthened by indulgence that they are now more restless and uneasy than they were before they began to rise. They find no satisfaction in their present possessions through an impatience still to enlarge them—to obtain what formerly it had never entered into their thoughts to desire.

My hearers, while we neglect the subjugation of our passions and lusts, our minds in every condition will be like the troubled sea. We are first exhorted to “let our conversation be without covetousness,” that is, to divest ourselves of all craving, intemperate desires; and then to “be content with such things as we have,” that is, with present things, whatever they may be. Though some former comforts should not be among them, yet we ought not to miss the enjoyment of those which remain, either through a vain regret for what has already happened,

or an anxious fear of what may happen hereafter. When an event has taken place, we know that it was the will of God that it should be so, and, by all the duty which we owe to him, are bound to acquiesce ; and as all futurities are also in his hand, they are really placed where we should wish them to be, and we cannot imagine them to be under a better direction. As Christians, we are forbidden to seek for ourselves the great things of life, or to be solicitous about its distant futurities. We ought to be satisfied in waiting upon God from day to day for our daily bread ; looking to him for all our supplies, while we continue our endeavours after them in the use of those means furnished by his providence, cheerfully confiding in his goodness to grant such success as he sees will be upon the whole best for us. Hence,

Secondly, Christian contentment is opposed to all inordinate *care* about to-morrow, all irregular methods for bettering our condition, and all the emotions of envy towards others. Our calling, as Christians, obliges us to diligence, faithfulness, and prudence, in performing the duties and labours of our respective professions and callings as men and as citizens. Every man is required to exercise a degree of forethought in providing for his own house. In these ways we are to seek and wait for such a portion of temporal comforts as Heaven may see fit to allot ; but we must wait with hearts submissive to the divine will—not suffering our minds to become the prey of corroding care and anxiety. Nor may

we allow our thoughts and affections to be so placed upon our temporal pursuits, or so taken up in labouring for the meat which perisheth, as to become negligent of our spiritual concerns, or formal or remiss in the discharge of religious duties. If “the one thing needful” be neglected, while our minds are cumbered and overcharged with worldly cares, instead of christian peace and contentment, distraction and confusion will reign in our bosoms. While we thus torment our minds, we do not improve our circumstances. It is all a senseless and fruitless anxiety. For who, by thus taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature, or alter the destinations of Heaven? These, after all, will guide the event, and very probably to the disappointment of those who are so criminally desirous of having it under their own control. How often have we seen those who have been thus hasty and eager to rise in the world above others, at last overwhelmed by misfortune and sinking even below mediocrity!

We may be thus reduced after a life spent in the most worthy and honourable pursuits; but such a reverse will not destroy the happiness of that man who has learned with the Apostle, how to be abased and suffer need without impatience—without charging God foolishly, or murmuring or repining at his dispensations. He will resolve to bear what Heaven sees fit to lay upon him, and, in this submission, he will experience a satisfaction, in itself superior to any worldly enjoyment.

Under such circumstances, unhumbled, carnal minds are sometimes tempted to irregular methods of obtaining relief and bettering their condition. They are prone to think the calamities which have befallen them or the poverty to which they are reduced, a kind of excuse for resorting to unfair means of gain. But men must be extremely impatient of their lot, when, to escape the little inconveniences of this life, they thus make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and forfeit all hope towards God. Some who do not thus openly rebel against Heaven, yet seem to give way to a spirit of envy. Their chagrin at their own misfortunes would not be so great, did they not witness the better success of those engaged in similar pursuits with themselves. They could be tolerably satisfied with their condition, did they not see others above them. Their pride is mortified and their envy excited, when they find themselves in the back ground, while their former equals or perhaps inferiors are advanced before them. There is reason to suspect that a great part of the uneasiness and discontent apparent among men, is occasioned by the different success of their affairs and the diversity in their respective conditions. Through a spirit lusting to envy, they are filled with disquietude. But to those possessed of a Christian spirit, whose treasure is in heaven, worldly distinctions are of but little moment. Their eye is not evil because these

trifles are bestowed more plentifully upon their neighbours, than upon themselves. Assured that every man is but a steward of the things which he possesses, and responsible for the use which he makes of them, they are well satisfied with the distributions of Providence. If they have not so many or so great talents as others, they know that proportionably less will be required of them. As we are all in a state of discipline, and the providence of God tries us individually by all that variety which we experience in our respective conditions, by those different portions both of enjoyment and suffering which fall to our lot, no pious man dares to complain, or to indulge the thought that he has any just ground for discontent. Hence,

Thirdly, In order to support the Christian virtue of contentment in every condition, habitual confidence in the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Disposer is indispensably necessary. When calamity overtakes us, and all things around us wear a dark and threatening aspect, if our minds hang in doubt whether we be not brought into this situation by some blind fatality, or through the agency of a Being who is hostile towards us, while entertaining such apprehensions, the utmost anxiety must be unavoidable. For this reason incorrigible sinners, when held in the cords of affliction, are compared to "wild bulls in a net." They fret themselves, and curse their king and their God,

blaspheming the Majesty of Heaven on account of their plagues. But instead of these ebullitions of impiety, all is peaceful and serene with those who have a filial confidence in God. When under the same outward sufferings, a sense of his wisdom and goodness awes them into submission and constrains them to hold their peace. Nay, when the most disastrous events befall them, they will in their hearts still justify the ways of Providence. Upon no occasion do they allow themselves to doubt whether wise and good purposes will not, in the issue, be accomplished by those things which at present are so perplexing and grievous. They give full credit to that promise of our Saviour, "What I do, ye know not now, but ye shall know hereafter." His Gospel abounds with promises, that all things, whether prosperous or adverse, "shall work together for good to those who love and fear God." In proportion as good men confide in these promises, they can with truth adopt the language of the text, and declare themselves contented under whatever circumstances they may be placed. But having given some account of the nature of contentment, the remainder of this discourse shall consist of some directions for its attainment.

That a contented mind is to be acquired by our own endeavours assisted by divine grace, is evident from the language of the text. "I have *learned*,"

says the Apostle, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." He does not here mention the particular considerations by which he was influenced; but no thinking mind can be at a loss for arguments showing the fitness and reasonableness of the temper which he exhibited.

Since the ordering of our condition, through every period of our existence, must necessarily be in the hand of him who made us, should it not render us satisfied with our lot, whatever it may be, to reflect,

First, How much safer and better it is for us to lie at his mercy than at the disposal of any other being? We know the *tenderness* of our own nature towards those of whose existence we have been instrumental; and can we imagine that he who has endued us with such feelings of compassion towards our offspring, can himself be wanting in care or kindness for those who are wholly his creatures—the immediate work of his hands, whom he has fearfully and wonderfully made? Is it not reasonable to believe, as our Saviour clearly intimates, that his goodness transcends whatever is human, in proportion to the infinity of his perfections above those of any finite nature? Under this persuasion, king David, when in a great strait between the choice of evils, said, "Let us now fall not into the hand of man, but into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great." While children

are of a tender age, the kindest of parents often for their good deny their requests, oppose their inclinations, and disappoint their hopes ; nay, are sometimes under a necessity of applying to them the rod of correction. Can we doubt whether a similar discipline with ourselves, may not be necessary in the view of the common Father of the universe ? “ Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life ? ” “ All these things are against me,” exclaimed the shortsighted Patriarch ; when those very circumstances, so grievous and distressing in appearance, were in reality conspiring and working together, to bring about events which filled him with the utmost joy and gladness. Had his favourite son, whom he so long and so deeply lamented, for whom he declared, that “ he would go down to the grave mourning,” escaped the pit and the prison, and passed a quiet life under the fond indulgence of a doting father, he would have missed of all his glory in Egypt, and of that lustre of character which rendered him typical of the common Saviour of the world.

In our own experience, have not many events, which at the time we considered as grievous misfortunes and disappointments, occasioned afterward, in the result, some great and unexpected good ? Are we not conscious of having once entertained desires in which, if we had been gratified, or of having engaged in pursuits in which, had we been

succeeded—we have now, upon the review, reason to believe that such gratification, or such success might probably have proved prejudicial, if not subversive of our happiness? What is more common than for men thus to mistake in their judgment, of the things which concern their own interest and welfare? How often do they choose real evil under the delusive appearance of good, and refuse the latter by falsely judging it to be evil? Solomon observes of riches, that they are, in some instances, “kept by their owners to their hurt.” This observation as often applies to all the other splendid objects of life. How large a proportion of the proud and aspiring through every age, after climbing to a dangerous height by many painful steps through a great part of their lives, seem, by the event, to have reached it for no other purpose, but to render their fall and ruin the more conspicuous, signal, and terrible. In humbler situations, the common multitude, always dissatisfied with their present condition, are incessantly contriving and labouring to effect a change; but when the object is obtained, the same symptoms of disquietude still appear. They are as restless and uneasy as before. The expected satisfaction is not realized; new experiments are contemplated; and thus, my hearers, we go on, and must go on, and pass our lives in discontent, unless we can persuade ourselves that we are so absolutely in the hand of God, that

we enjoy nothing but what he gives us ; that we lose nothing but what he sees fit to take away ; that we miss nothing but what he denies us ; that we suffer nothing but what he lays upon us ; that whatever our condition be at any time, and at all times, it is precisely that in which he places us ; and that, as all these things are thus ordered by him, they are, upon the whole, the wisest and best for us. When this persuasion shall be so settled and fixed in our minds as to control all our thoughts and passions, then, and not till then, shall we know what is meant by christian contentment, or experience inward peace and satisfaction. The reasonableness of this temper may be argued,

Secondly, From our relation to God considered as creatures, as servants, and as sinners. As creatures, what are our rights and claims ? We find ourselves existing upon God's earth ; we open our eyes upon the world and the fullness thereof ; but can we say that all these things belong to us ? Are the bread and the wine, the wool and the flax, the silver and the gold, and all other treasures so peculiarly our own as to come at our call ; or, on the failure of any article, are we so deprived of our right as to have cause of complaint ? We never had any thing which we could properly call our own. Naked, empty, and defenceless, we came into the world, and while here, we live from

day to day in continual, arbitrary dependence for our whole subsistence.

That Being who made and who sustains us, is undoubtedly entitled to our whole service ; but does it belong to servants so absolutely dependent, and who, after they have done their best, cannot be profitable to their owner, to prescribe to him how they shall be maintained, fed, clothed, and accommodated ?

But we are so unfortunate as to be under the necessity of acknowledging ourselves to have been not only unprofitable, but unfaithful servants—to have become sinners. As such, we can claim nothing but the wages of sin. These, and these only, are our due. “ Wherefore, then, should a living man complain ?” He ought to be thankful for any condition short of finished misery. But, through the unparalleled mercy of God, we are redeemed sinners, ransomed by the blood of Christ from the second death, and made candidates for life eternal in heaven hereafter. By the Gospel of Christ, we are called from a state of bondage, a bondage incomparably more wretched than that of the Israelites in Egypt, the bondage of sin and Satan, into the glorious liberty of the children of God. We are now on our journey towards the heavenly Canaan, that land flowing with milk and honey, where every want shall be supplied, every desire gratified,—where pure, unmixed happiness

shall be our eternal inheritance. With such prospects before us, shall we think much of the little inconveniences and hardships which may attend us while we are on our way through this wilderness? Of all persons, surely it least becomes Christians to betray any symptoms of discontent. Whoever else complains, they have the most solid ground, the most abundant reason, not to *learn* only, but to *practise* the lesson in the text. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." But again,

Thirdly, Whatever our present condition may be, if we would impartially consider it in all its relations, it would probably be found far more eligible, or at least not comparably so bad, as our imaginations and passions represent it. Perhaps you are poor. You must, therefore, be industrious, frugal, and economical in your manner of living. Your diet must be more simple, your raiment a little coarser, and all superfluities dispensed with. You cannot fare sumptuously every day. You cannot indulge your vanity in show and parade, nor can you have goods laid up for many years. You will have but few friends and no flatterers. And what mighty evil can there be in all this? It may be queried whether these inconveniences may not be more than balanced by your freedom from the cares and distractions, the dangers and temptations, the

snare and incumbrance to which wealth exposes. Besides, it is the condition to which the great majority of mankind through every age and in every country are subjected ;—and will you think it hard to fare as the generality of your fellow creatures and even of your fellow Christians ? Think of those primitive Christians, who took joyfully the spoiling of their goods. Think of St. Paul and the other Apostles, whose lives were spent under all the heaviest calamities which a wicked world could heap upon them. Above all, think of your great Master himself, who had not where to lay his head. Keeping these examples in view, and daily imploring the aids of heavenly grace, you will probably at length be able to adopt as your own the language of the text.

SERMON XII.

CHARITY.

1 COR. xiii. 4.

Charity envieth not.

THE charity here mentioned, is that principle of love to God and man, rooted in the heart and extending its influence over the life, which forms the substance of all true religion, and is called the "fulfilling of the law." The importance of this principle is urged in language the most forcible. Without it, we are told, all human accomplishments, and all supernatural gifts will profit us nothing. Though we were skilled in all the sciences, masters of all languages, and could speak with the tongues even of angels; though we understood all mysteries, and had the gift of prophecy to foretell future events, and of a miraculous faith so as to be able to remove mountains; nay, though we should abound in the outward works of charity, to such a degree as to bestow all our goods in alms, and in the end give our bodies to martyrdom; yet if, in the sight of the heart-searching Being, these things proceed from

any other principle than the love of God shed abroad in the heart,—the whole will profit us nothing. However splendid our gifts may be, however shining our apparent virtues, yet we are but as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, while we remain destitute of this divine love. It is this which forms the essence of the christian temper, and constitutes the excellence of the christian character. All its properties are in direct opposition to the propensities of the depraved heart. “Charity suffereth long and is kind.” It endures a series of ill usage; and yet, instead of being instigated to revenge, studies to be kind, gentle, and forgiving. “Charity envieth not.” In this respect, it is opposed to that spirit in apostate man, “which lusteth to envy.” This evil spirit is so generally predominant, and its baneful fruits so abundant and malignant, that all have need of caution against them. Are calumny, slander, and defamation universally diffused? Are they handed round from circle to circle in our daily conversation, and extended far and wide in the vehicles of public intelligence? Are the repose of individuals, the peace of families, and the order of society disturbed, and the spirits of parties and factions sharpened against each other by these means? Nearly all these evils may be traced to *envy*, as the root whence they spring. Envy is a malevolent feeling towards others, on account of certain advantages possessed by them, which we crave for ourselves. It wishes them evil, not as a retaliation for evil received from

them, or as a punishment for any wrong which they have committed ; but merely because in the esteem of the envious person, they are supposed to be happier, more prosperous, or fortunate, than he is himself. In this respect, it differs from common anger or resentment, which is occasioned by some real or supposed injury or offence. Envy pretends no just ground of complaint, but yet feels malignant, and has an appetite for vengeance. Of all our bad passions, therefore, it is the most deformed, and bears the nearest likeness to the supposed temper of infernals. Its character is so universally odious, that none are willing to have it known that they are under its influence. It may indeed be hoped, that the number of persons is small in whom so vile a disposition is suffered to reign predominant. They who are conscious of its emotions within them, think it necessary to conceal or disguise them, not only before the world, but even to themselves. They affect to believe that the uneasiness which they feel at the sight of others' prosperity, arises from some less culpable cause than that of envy.

But though this evil principle should not form a visible and striking feature in our character, yet it may not be amiss for us to inquire, whether it do not occasionally, at least, gain the ascendant in our hearts, whether it be not secretly indulged, and be not, in reality, our motive for crediting and circulating ill reports concerning those, whose success, elevation, or fame, give us pain rather than pleasure. Various causes

and considerations may conspire in checking and restraining the stronger emotions of envy, and yet a degree of this poison may fester in our bosom. Though it should not produce any violent agitations of spirit, nor be manifested in any deeds or speeches of malignity; yet if you experience a ruffled and disturbed mind at seeing yourselves outstripped in the career of wealth, of fame, or in any other pursuit, this inward uneasiness from such a cause is a decisive proof of something amiss in your prevailing temper. That mind must be diseased which is hurt and wounded as often as it beholds the superior success of its neighbour. Mere emulation, indeed, is not culpable. In every laudable pursuit, we ought to vie with one another, and strive to excel. If others have fairly borne from us the prize, we may regret our own defects, but ought not to repine at their success.

The envious man can neither bear that his equals should rise above him, nor that his inferiors should come upon a par with him. It is said of the unbelieving Jews at Antioch, in Pisidia, that, when they saw the multitudes of Gentiles assembled to hear Paul preach, "they were filled with envy." Their national pride abhorred a religion which raised the despised Gentiles to the enjoyment of equal privileges with themselves, and brought them into the same relation to God. In modern times, religious advantages and endowments are not often the grounds of envy. Though virtue, probity, and

moral goodness be in themselves estimable above all other accomplishments, and give to their possessors a distinction more valuable and honourable, than crowns or sceptres, yet they rarely excite envy. It has been said, that “no man is envied for being more just, more generous, more patient, or forgiving than others.” But though he may not be envied on account of these virtues in themselves considered, yet the reputation, esteem, and public favour which may attend the known practice of them, do often render him the object of envy. Cain did not covet for himself the faith and sincerity which attended the oblations of his brother; but the visible acceptance with God, which these virtues procured to the offering of Abel, filled the heart of Cain with malignant rage. It was not the excellence of Joseph’s character above theirs, which stirred the envy of his brethren, but because their father loved and distinguished him above them. Among ourselves, though no man may be envied merely for his virtues, yet the temporal advantages which those virtues procure, the worldly honours and distinctions to which a character eminently good is sometimes recommended, set in motion a thousand tongues and a thousand pens to destroy, if possible, that character. All its virtues must be shaded and brought into suspicion, and all its failings and defects must be enhanced and aggravated into crimes. These things are of daily occurrence among the competitors for places of power, honour, and emolument. We do not usually envy those who

move in a sphere remote and distant from our own, and with whom we have no competition. They are rival candidates for employment, fame, or favour, who are in danger of looking with an evil eye upon each other's success.

Among the poor, indeed, there is generally a disposition to envy their more prosperous and wealthy neighbours. We all love the world and the things of the world; and when we see others in the possession of comforts, conveniences, and pleasures, which we have not the means to command, we are exceedingly prone to feel the emotions of discontent. We overrate the value of all worldly distinctions, and assign to them a degree of enjoyment far beyond what is experienced by their possessors. We think ourselves as deserving as they, and on this ground conclude that we have just cause to complain of the hardness of our lot.

Pride and an inordinate love of the world are the dispositions which engender envy. By thinking too highly of ourselves and of our own merit, we are led to claim more from others than they are willing to grant. Soured by disappointment, and at the same time putting an exorbitant value on the object which we have missed, and another has gained, our discontent, mortification, and chagrin are suffered to ferment into the rancour of envy. This becomes, as Solomon has expressed it, the "rottenness of the bones," and renders a man his own tormentor. After being preyed upon by so vile a

passion, he is fit to associate with none but fiends. Yet the Scripture testifies of the ancient heathen, that "they were full of envy," and of the depraved nature in us all, that "it lusteth to envy."

How much, then, does it concern us, my hearers, to obtain that new nature mentioned in the text, under the name of love or charity, "which envieth not." In every real Christian, this temper prevails. It consists in a heart universally benevolent, wishing and seeking the good and happiness of all its fellow-beings. It is a participation of the divine nature—of that nature which is love in the abstract. In every heart imbued with the love of God, there is a prevailing propensity to imitate that Being, whose tender mercies are over all his works, who "causes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." All who are born of God are followers of him as dear children. Like him, they delight in the diffusion of happiness. As he is good to all, and has no pleasure in the misery of any, so they who are transformed into his image, are disposed to rejoice in the happiness of all around them. Their noble and enlarged minds are, in no small degree, happy in witnessing the happiness of others. His pleasure in the prosperity of others, would not be destroyed in a good Christian, though he himself should suffer adversity. It would indeed mitigate his pain, and heighten his satisfaction to be assured that there was not another sufferer on earth besides himself.

My brethren, is this temper our own? Are our hearts thus filled with that love "which envieth not?" With what feelings do we behold the superior success and prosperity of those who started with us in the race of life, engaged in the same line of business, or in the same profession with ourselves? It may be that we are left far in the rear, while they are advanced to opulence and distinction, and have attracted the notice of the public. Does your heart sicken at the sight of their prosperity, and feel the workings of uneasiness and dissatisfaction? Do you hear of their merit and fame with reluctance? Do you feel a secret disposition to detract from their worth, to suggest your suspicion of some unknown defects in their character? Would it gratify your spleen to see them fall from their present elevation, or the current of public favour diverted from them? Are not these the symptoms of envy? From this evil passion that bosom cannot be pure and free, in which such thoughts and dispositions are indulged. If you endeavour to quiet your conscience by the excuse, that what you feel is but an honest indignation at seeing the unworthy prosper, it behoves you to be critical and impartial in examining your heart, whether their unworthiness or their prosperity itself be the cause of your disquietude. Whatever their defects or faults may be, if you felt little or no concern about them while they

were in a low condition ; if it was not till they had risen above you, that you first discovered their unworthiness, in this case the probability is evidently against you, that something amiss in yourselves gives you this discernment of ill desert in others. Or, if you pretend that your uneasiness arises from an apprehension of the ill use which they will make of their good fortune, you ought to reflect that for this you are not responsible. If we see with regret, rare and extraordinary talents in the hands of those who bury them in the earth or pervert them to ill purposes ; still, as every instance of this kind is a prosperity which brings destruction after it, the case calls for no other feelings than those of grief and compassion for those unhappy persons, who thus contrive to make themselves miserable with the blessings of heaven.

In short, when we consider, that whatever our advantages or disadvantages of form and bodily constitution, our mental abilities, our success in business, our circumstances in life, our worldly possessions, reputation, and influence in society, may be,—the whole has been received from the providence of God ; that all the distinctions subsisting among men, are his allotments ; that it is he who, in every instance, maketh one to differ from another, maketh poor and maketh rich, bringeth low and lifteth up ; that, whether our talents be great or small, few or many, they are such as

we have received from him, and must in the end account to him for the use which we make of them ;—when we thus reflect, what room in reason can we find for dissatisfaction with our own lot, or for uneasiness at beholding what in our apprehension may seem the more eligible situation of our neighbour? The order and general good of society require a diversity of ranks, employments, and conditions—some high and some low ; some must command, while others obey. The rich and the poor meet together, and are mutually helpful and subservient to each other. With respect to real enjoyment and the things which constitute human happiness, they are not so wide apart, as is generally imagined. They to whom fortune is most favourable, possess the advantage but for a short and precarious duration. So mutable and fluctuating is the condition of humanity, so manifold the unforeseen changes to which we all lie open, that it is no uncommon thing for those who are regarded with envy on one day, on the very next to pass through a vicissitude which renders them the objects of compassion. While envy turns pale at beholding the splendid apparel and luxurious indulgence of the rich man, and he himself, presuming that his mountain stands strong, pleases his imagination with the prospect of many years of enjoyment, that very night “his soul is required.” Thus he disappears in the midst of all

his glory. Is it not wonderful that creatures of so short duration, who are such hasty passengers through life, who are all liable to such numberless mishaps and casualties by the way, casualties which compel us at the moment to commiserate one another, should yet be so prone to discontent and disquietude at the little inequalities in their respective lots, the trifling advantages which one occasionally and for a short season possesses above another?

The indulgence of such a temper is as impious, as it is foolish and absurd. It is a flying in the face of Providence, a rebelling against the divine dispensations, an opposition of heart to the will of him by whom our respective conditions in life are assigned. It often happens that those who are the most prone to this temper, are persons whose ill qualities or ill conduct cut them off from any rational prospect of success and prosperity, and render them unworthy to be thus distinguished. In the ordinary course of providence, "wisdom bringeth to honour, and the diligent hand maketh rich." Men who strive to excel in their profession or calling, who are attentive to their business, punctual to their engagements, upright in their dealings, and economical, frugal, and prudent in their manner of living and in the management of their affairs—such men rarely fail of a competency of the good things of the world, and sometimes attain to afflu-

ence. While thus acquiring their possessions, they at the same time usually enjoy them in as high a degree as the present circumstances of man will admit. The bosoms of such men are rarely disturbed by feelings of envy. Conscious of their own exertions and deserts, they are above little jealousies and low competitions. Accustomed to an open and ingenuous conduct, their honest, unsuspecting hearts render their lives serene and tranquil, as the fine day darkened by no passing clouds, nor ruffled by any boisterous wind.

They are the proud and indolent who are the most liable to become the prey of envy. Too important in their own esteem to stoop to the industry or application requisite to success, and yet believing themselves entitled to every good which the world can bestow, they behold the prosperity of others with chagrin. Their dark and distempered minds are always uneasy and discontented, always repining at their own hard lot, and always fretting and murmuring at the superior prosperity of others. The dispositions of such men must be changed before they can be happy. To them nothing can be more needful than that divine love or charity mentioned in the text. This, and this only, will effectually clear their minds of their present disturbed thoughts, render them humble and modest in their estimate of themselves, convince them how much above their deserts their present condi-

tion is, render them truly thankful for the many unmerited mercies with which they are encompassed, and enable them to learn this most useful lesson, "in whatever state they are, therewith to be content."

SERMON XIII.

SELF-GOVERNMENT.

PROVERBS xvi. 32.

He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.

AMONG those who are called the great men of the earth, no desire is more common or predominant than that of dominion and conquest. By enterprises of this sort, by the extension of their power, men become great in the estimation of the world. The conquerors of cities and the rulers of nations are considered as standing on an eminence above the rest of their species—the objects of general homage and admiration. The glory of their names and the splendour of their achievements are preserved in the annals of history, and handed down with eclat from one generation to another. But there is a different kind of conquest and dominion, to which the wise man in the text gives the preference—a greatness superior to all the

trophies of war, and to all the trappings of power—a greatness which yet lies within the reach of every man, and to which we all ought ardently to aspire. “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.” Victory over our passions and the due government of ourselves are here recommended as more important, and in themselves more valuable and desirable, than any other conquest or dominion.

Of all our passions, or of the stronger emotions of our minds, none are more violent than those which are usually excited by what we consider as unprovoked injuries or affronts. The sallies of anger and resentment are sudden and often excessive; and when unrestrained, prove dreadful in their effects. A behaviour opposite to these irregularities is implied in being “slow to anger.” It denotes such a full and steady command over our resentful passions as suffers them not to rise upon slight and trivial occasions, and, when excited by a just cause, not to exceed either in height or duration the bounds of moderation, or the dictates of reason and the precepts of religion. But whoever thus governs these more turbulent affections and maintains the mastery over them, may be supposed capable of controlling all his other passions and appetites, of limiting his desires and regulating his general temper by the rules of duty and propriety. Therefore *ruling his spirit* is added in the text as

an explanation of what is meant in being *slow to anger*. The due government of every passion and of all the propensities of our nature is included in the character described in the text. Self-command upon every occasion, and the imposing proper restraints upon all our inclinations and desires is the evident import of *ruling one's spirit*.

The extirpation of our passions is not required. They belong to our original constitution. Human nature, while innocent and uncorrupted, was still susceptible of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow, of anger, compassion, love, and aversion. Our Saviour himself, after his incarnation, when here on earth, was upon some occasions moved with "anger;" on others, "grieved in spirit;" and on others again, "touched with compassion." Those strong emotions of spirit, therefore, which we call passions, are not in themselves, and when duly regulated, sinful. They may be rendered subservient to many useful and important ends.

The violence and irregularity of which they are susceptible are the fruit of our apostacy from God. By falling under the reigning power of sinful propensities, reason, the intended regulator of our whole man, was weakened, and the passions, which were intended to be its obedient subjects, received great additional strength and became insubordinate. No longer balanced by judgment and discretion, they gain the ascendancy, and,

from being the ministers of reason, become the tyrants of the soul, exercising an usurped dominion over all its nobler, and what were designed to be its ruling powers. The effects of this anarchy in the human mind—this usurpation of the passions, appear in our blind and foolish attachment to improper and unworthy objects, in our being driven into wrong and hurtful pursuits, or hurried on to excess in those which might otherwise be innocent. Under the sway of our passions, our desires flow forth in every direction, and we rush forward to their gratification with a blind and dangerous impetuosity. Thus circumstanced, the mind resembles a ship in a tempest, without rudder or compass, driven by the winds and waves, and in constant danger of rocks and shoals. Our recovery from this misery and danger, can be no otherwise effected, than by reason's resuming the helm, reducing the passions to order, directing their course, and holding them back from exorbitancy and excess. This is what is meant by a man's "ruling his spirit."

In gaining this conquest over ourselves, the discoveries and precepts of Scripture afford us the most signal aid. They strengthen and assist our perceptive faculties in discerning the distinction between good and evil, in forming a just estimate of things, in ascertaining the worth of those objects which solicit our regards, and in directing our pur-

suits accordingly. They also furnish motives so weighty and cogent, as cannot fail, when duly considered, to check every inordinate desire, and deaden the force of every unlawful passion. The man who truly imbibes the spirit of the Gospel, and resolutely follows its directions, will, in his general temper and conduct, show that he is slow to anger and "rules his spirit." Under the yoke of him who was meek and lowly, and learning of him, he will not be easily provoked, nor upon any occasion carry his resentments beyond the rules of justice and propriety. No transports of passion will hurry him into excess, darken his judgment, or seduce his reason. "In patience he will possess his soul," amidst the various changes of this state of trial. Resting upon fixed principles, and possessing a firm and steadfast mind, all the inferior propensities of nature will feel the curb of reason and religion. No hopes or fears, no joys or sorrows about worldly things, will unduly elate or depress him. Nothing in his outward situation will be suffered habitually to discompose his temper, or so to disturb his inward serenity, as to unfit him for discharging the duties or partaking of the comforts of life. Calm and gentle, dispassionate and unbiassed, inflexible to vice, and steadfast in the pursuit of virtue, he will hold himself always attentive to the voice of conscience, and ready at all times to obey its dictates. These things belong to that government of ourselves

to which reason as well as revelation exhorts us. To induce us to seek after it, the text leads us to contemplate its superior excellence, to any other conquest or dominion. This is the immediate import of its assertions. "He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city." The truth of these assertions will appear, if we consider,

That the due regulation of our passions and government of ourselves, argue a strength and greatness of mind, of which the power of a prince, and the triumph of a conqueror, are no proof. Man's chief eminence above the beasts, consists in the extent and strength of his rational faculties. In no case is the strength of reason so unquestionably manifest, as when it subjects the appetites and passions to its sway, steadily controls all the animal propensities, and guides the general temper and conduct. The more perfect any one is in this government of himself, in the same proportion does he rise above others—is better and greater than they. On the other part, the want of self-command betrays the weakness of reason. Little minds are peculiarly liable to become the sport of passion and prejudice. They are easily deluded by the sophistry of their desires, and those false appearances which corrupt affections and an irregular fancy throw upon objects. In them, the voice of reason is too feeble to be heard amidst the

noise and clamour of turbulent passions. Unable to resist the allurements of interest and pleasure, they are hurried into various excesses, from one extreme to another.

From this tyranny of their passions, princes and heroes have no exemption. It has often appeared that, while they have governed nations and commanded armies, they have had no command over themselves. History presents us with but few celebrated conquerors, who have not themselves been conquered by their lusts, and carried captive by some degrading passion. In what, then, does their greatness consist? The distinctions of power and station are adventitious circumstances, having no certain connexion with either merit or abilities. The weak and the worthless often possess them. The place or the station may command respect, while the person who fills it is secretly despised. Nor are martial exploits sure marks of true greatness. The courage of the warrior in the field of battle may be no better, and is often, perhaps, of the same kind, with that of the noble animal that carries him on to the combat. The horse “mocketh at fear; smelling the battle afar off, he saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha. Though the quiver rattleth against him—the glittering spear and shield,—yet he turneth not back from the sword. Going on to meet the armed men, he swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage.” From simi-

lar passions in men, from anger, fierceness, and rage, more frequently, perhaps, than from the settled principles of reason, have victory and conquest proceeded. The conqueror of nations and kingdoms has, after all, shown himself a mere poltroon with respect to his spiritual enemies, having no heart or courage to encounter those lusts which war against the soul. In numberless instances, it has appeared much easier to vanquish armies and take citadels, than to conquer passions, moderate desires, forego revenge, and preserve a character for meekness, justice, and temperance, amidst the allurements of interest, the pride of power, and the baits of sensuality. To this purport, an ancient heathen poet has said,

By virtue's precepts to control
The thirsty cravings of the soul,
Is over wider realms to reign
Unenvied monarch, than if Spain
Thou could'st to distant Lybia join,
And both the Carthages were thine.

As the man who rules his spirit excels the prince and the conqueror in strength of reason, so he is above them in wisdom and discretion. In every excess and irregularity of passion there is folly. What we do from its impulse, we find reason to condemn in our cooler moments. Under the sallies of resentment, or while any irregular desire is predominant within us, the dictates of reason are

disregarded, and we do things of which we are afterward ashamed. Indeed, the transports of passion are a fit of madness and distraction. At such seasons we are beside ourselves; and there is nothing so foolish and extravagant, of which we may not become guilty. By these follies and extravagances, they who are called kings and heroes, have been often degraded and debased. After subduing nations and countries, by falling under the power of unbridled passions, they have themselves become more truly wretched and despicable than the captives led in chains on the day of their triumph. Having no rule over their own spirit, their minds have resembled the ruin which they have spread, "a city broken down and without walls." Their power and rank in society, have served but for the exaltation of folly, to render it the more conspicuous, and often the more mischievous. To what disadvantage do the excesses of such turbulent and unruly spirits appear, when compared with the moderation, the prudence, and wisdom of well regulated minds! "The discretion of a man," says inspiration, "deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression." In the opinion of Solomon, nothing more is requisite to make a wise man, than the due government of his passions. "He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding." Though his natural abilities should be but indifferent, yet, with the advantage of a sedate and composed mind, he

is really wiser and fitter for great undertakings, and more likely to prove successful in them, than another of greater vivacity and brighter parts, when these are attended, as they frequently are, with a temper irascible and violent. Unrestrained anger infatuates all the powers of reason, and during its continuance, renders men as void of understanding—as fierce and dangerous, as the wild beasts of the forest.

Such characters have appeared at the head of armies, and swayed the sceptre over nations and kingdoms ; yet their honours and triumphs have never engaged that esteem of the heart, that inward respect, which we universally feel for the character of him who has conquered his passions, and steadily governs himself by the rules of reason and virtue. Such a government of ourselves excels every other kind of dominion in this, that it always proceeds from principles and qualities of mind, in themselves truly estimable and praiseworthy,—from a competent knowledge of ourselves, a discernment of the differences of things, a just estimate of their comparative value, and a steady determination of soul to what is fit and right. From the influence of these principles and dispositions, good men are led to unwearied efforts in beating down the body of sin, in keeping under their inordinate desires, in obtaining and preserving the rule of their own spirits, the mastery over their passions and lusts.

But conquest and dominion over others, are no proof of mental excellence. For the most part they originate from resentment, hatred, and revenge, or from avarice, ambition, and vainglory—passions which are in themselves the sum of all human weakness, folly, and guilt.

Another excellence of self-government above that of any other kind of conquest or dominion, consists in its happier effects and consequences. These are great and valuable beyond all estimation. From no other victories or conquests can we reap fruits comparable with those which result from the conquest of our own passions and lusts. Humanity weeps at those scenes of blood and ruin through which victories are gained, cities taken, and enemies subdued. Though the sufferers were in every instance the aggressors, and in this view received but the just reward of their deeds; yet that such dreadful recompenses should be so often and repeatedly necessary, is a most melancholy consideration—an awful proof both of the depravity and misery of our nature. All these things, however, would be effectually prevented, were self-government to become universal among men. Would they be persuaded each one to conquer his passions and “rule his spirit,” this alone would remedy all the principal evils of human life,—personal discontents, family contentions, variance among neighbours, civil discord, national quarrels,

and foreign wars. "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" says the Apostle; "come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." Here we find, in our own ungoverned passions and lusts, the source of those great evils, which fill the world with misery. Nor can there be any bulwarks, any mounds or barriers raised against these evils so strong as effectually to exclude them or stop their progress, while the spring and source of them remains and is kept open. The unruly passions of men will continue to supply, without end, renewed inundations both of private and public calamity. But if men would apply themselves diligently to the ruling of their own spirits, if instead of affecting to have dominion over others, they would sedulously strive to get the command over themselves; if instead of giving way to ambition, they would confine their desires, and learn to be meek and lowly, and content with such things as they have,—then would all private injuries and offences be removed, then would wars cease in the world; there would be no acts of violence and oppression, and no complaining in our streets.

In the due government of ourselves, we should also find a remedy for most of those evils and disorders which render other kinds of government ne-

cessary. The professed end of all civil governments is, that they may be a "terror to evil doers," and restrain the irregularities of those who impose no restraints upon themselves. Laws are made, not "for the righteous," but "for the lawless and disobedient," to prevent the evils and mischiefs which their unruly passions and lusts have a strong and constant tendency to produce. It is plain, therefore, that if men could be brought to rule their own spirits, and govern themselves by the laws of reason and conscience; other laws—the whole code of penal statutes—would become unnecessary, and the authority of rulers and magistrates would be in a great measure superseded.

Self-government would not only prevent those evils which it is the design of civil government to restrain, but those also which escape the vigilance of all human laws. And these are not a few. Of the whole catalogue of crimes committed against the peace and happiness of society, it is perhaps but a small proportion comparatively, which receive a just recompense of reward from the sword of the magistrate. His vengeance falls upon those offences only, which are known and proved. Beyond this boundary he has no power to punish. Yet in the dark regions of secrecy and concealment, how manifold are the vices of men, how numberless the wrongs and injuries which they daily suffer one from another! Behind the curtain,

what scenes of fraud and injustice, of cruelty and revenge are acted! And, besides those greater offences which escape punishment merely by the perpetrators escaping detection, there are innumerable other actions of a hurtful and pernicious tendency, which, for want of a determined and distinct character, come not under the cognizance of human laws. They lie so near the borders of right and wrong, and are susceptible of such various and doubtful construction, that the civil authority dares not arrest them; yet their mischief in society is unspeakable. Under this description we may enumerate the want of natural affection among near relations, the rigour of parents, the ingratitude of children, various degrees and countless instances of inhumanity, false and treacherous friendships, violations of domestic peace, perfidious counsels, vile suspicions, slanderous insinuations, and the cruel advantages which the artful and hard-hearted, the fraudulent and designing, are every day taking of the honest, the simple, and the necessitous around them. No laws made, or authority exercised by men, can reach these evils. But the very roots of them would be eradicated, were self-government to become universal. In proportion as men learn to subdue their passions, and restrain their inordinate desires, society will cease to be torn with these briars and thorns.

Another happy effect to be expected from this government of ourselves, above every other rule or dominion to which we can aspire, is a remedy for those evils and miseries, which are occasioned by almost all the other human governments in the world. The powers of civil government are, indeed, intended, as ordained by Heaven, to be a blessing to the world. But like all other blessings in the hands of unprincipled men, they have been, among most nations, the weightiest engines of general oppression. This would not be the case, did they who rule over men first learn to rule themselves. But such characters have been always rare in the world, and more rare perhaps among the candidates for power, than among any other class of men. The fact is, that the rulers of the world have, in general, been those who were themselves ruled by the most gigantic lusts and passions. The consequence has been, that, under pretence of protecting states and nations from mutual inroads and invasions, and individuals from mutual wrongs and robberies, they have appropriated to themselves, under the name of revenues, the national wealth, revelled on the hard earnings of public industry, and nourished their luxury, pride, pomp, and glory, with the tears of general misery. From the days of Nimrod down to the present time, the sun perhaps has never performed his circuit, without beholding the rulers of nations very generally, with

their courtiers and favourites, rioting in all the gratifications of unbounded sensuality; and a great proportion of their subjects groaning under the accumulated burden of their oppressions and the cruelty of their edicts. "The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed."

It is obvious, however, that all these evils and abuses would be excluded by self-government among rulers. If they would learn to subdue their passions and rule their spirits by the dictates of reason and conscience, they would then become in reality "the ministers of God for good" to the community.

On the other part, in the opposite relation, self-government among subjects is the best security for their quiet and peaceable submission to good and wholesome laws, and ready support in carrying them into execution. If this be wanting, if they who are to obey, have no command over themselves, no rule of their own spirit, they may soon throw off all respect for civil rule, and trample upon the most just and necessary laws. Nay, their passions and prejudices may subvert the very foundations of government, and destroy its form and constitution. All this may proceed from the slightest causes. Any little disappointment, any trivial grievance, or even the wanton desire of change, may prompt an incendiary to spread a

train among the passions of multitudes, as combustible and inflammable as himself. In a day or an hour, as it were, a fabrick of government erected by the collected wisdom of ages, and purchased at the expense of thousand of lives and millions of treasure,—in a day or an hour, the whole structure may be prostrated by the wild fury of popular sedition and insurrection.

How forcibly, my hearers, should these considerations convince us of the necessity, importance, and excellence of self-government above any other rule or power! Without it, no man is properly qualified for discharging the duties of any station, relation, or condition in life. He is fit neither to command, nor to obey. He can be neither a good master, nor a good servant; a good parent, friend, neighbour, nor citizen. Having his passions under no control, he must of course be a dangerous member of society. Nay, he is an enemy to himself, a disturber of his own peace and quiet, a stranger to happiness and self-enjoyment, a slave to the worst of tyrants, under the most ignoble, abject, and wretched bondage to which the rational nature can be subjected.

I therefore add, in conclusion, as another excellence of self-government above any other dominion, its tendency to make us *free* in the truest sense of the word. “His servants ye are to whom ye obey.” They whose passions and lusts have the ascenden-

cy over them, are under servitude to these vile and degrading masters. Many are so deluded, as to mistake these chains for liberty, and glory in following whithersoever appetite and inclination lead. But in reality this freedom is suitable to those animals only, that have nothing higher than sense and instinct to direct them. As a rational, moral being, the freedom of man consists in the empire of his reason over all the propensities of his nature, in following its dictates, and in doing, at all times, whatever it judges fit and best to be done. This is to be free indeed. This raises him to his proper place and rank in the scale of being, and gives him his dignity and superiority to the irrational creation. In the exercise of a freedom like this, he resembles the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. So perfect and strong is the sway of reason in them, that their minds are incapable of any irregular motion or desire whatever. As we hope, hereafter to associate with them, it is indispensably requisite that we now begin the imitation of them, by throwing off every yoke of sin and lust, and acquiring the same kind of freedom. This cannot be obtained by any conquest or dominion over others. Nor can it be purchased by the peculiar treasure of kings. It is a nobility which no earthly power can confer. The only way to obtain it, is by resolute and persevering exertions, each one in conquering his passions and ruling his spirit. A

warfare against these enemies and usurpers in our own breasts, may be found at first a troublesome and difficult enterprise. By degrees, however, it will become easier, and victory will prove an ample recompense for all the labours and pains which the conflict may cost. It will crown us with complete and everlasting freedom.

SERMON XIV.

LOVE OF PLEASURE.

1 TIMOTHY v. 6.

But she that liveth in pleasure, is dead while she liveth.

We too often witness among us melancholy examples of the character here designated—"persons living in pleasure," and yet, to all the best purposes of life, "dead while they live." To every kind of pleasure, indeed, this censure does not apply. There are many pleasures which are innocent, rational, and religious. These are intended by the gracious Author of our being to constitute our happiness. That we might be blessed with such enjoyments, must have been his chief aim in our creation. It is inconceivable that he could have had any other view in bringing us into existence, but to enable us to partake of his bounty and rejoice in his goodness. We are placed in a world abounding with objects and means for the moderate and regular gratification of all the senses,

appetites, and propensities of our nature. How pleasant and delightful to our eyes are light and colours, and all the grand, the beautiful, and entertaining prospects presented by this visible creation ! From the flowers of spring and the blooming scenes of nature, what refreshing fragrances do we inhale ! From the melody of sounds, what entertainment and delight enter our ears ! How are the pleasures of taste consulted in that vast variety of things which we eat and drink, each having its peculiar flavour ! All our organs of sense are so constructed and adapted to their respective objects, as to become so many inlets of enjoyment. Sensations of pleasure attend the use of all the means necessary for sustaining and preserving life. In satisfying the cravings of hunger and thirst and all the appetites of our animal nature, we experience gratification and delight. In the regular enjoyment of these pleasures there is nothing amiss. Though we share them in common with the brute animals ; though they belong to the inferior part of our nature, to the body only ; yet, while they are in subordination to the nobler and more refined pleasures of the mind, and are rendered subservient to our improvement in knowledge and virtue, they are not only innocent and lawful, but are evidently intended by our bountiful Creator as ingredients in our happiness. They are to be received with grateful acknowledgments of his goodness. “Every

creature of God," says the Apostle, "is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving."

But we must ever remember that whilst, in our corporeal frame, we are allied to the animals of this earth; in the faculties of our minds and our future destination, we claim kindred with the spirits of heaven. Being made but little lower than the angels, like them we have a capacity for knowing, serving, and enjoying our adorable Creator. This must be the chief and ultimate end of our being, the sum of its glory and happiness. For the attainment of this end, the present life is a state of discipline, the great object of which is improvement in knowledge and virtue—the acquisition of those intellectual, moral, and spiritual qualifications, which may fit us hereafter for the society of heaven, and the everlasting favour and approbation of the God of heaven. This is the final and glorious inheritance which our heavenly Father has provided and has in reserve for those of his children among men, who in the present life acquire those habits and virtues necessary to fit them for the actual possession. And while they are thus training up for a blessed immortality, they are allowed by faith and hope to anticipate in a degree the joys in store for them hereafter. These anticipations are increased in proportion to their proficiency in virtue and holiness. In the keeping of

the divine commands they are sensible of a present and great reward, through the inward peace and comfort of their minds. They experience “the ways of wisdom to be ways of pleasantness, and and all her paths to be peace.” Their present spiritual comforts and enjoyments keep pace with their preparations for heaven. “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.” Like the rising light, their path shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. Such a life and such pleasures tend to the glory and perfection of our nature.

But all these things are totally disregarded by those who, in the sense of the text, “live in pleasure.” It is evident that in these words is introduced a character directly the reverse of that of a well governed mind, temperate and moderate in the enjoyments of sense, and capable of finding pleasure in works of charity and piety, in the exercises of devotion, and an exemplary walk with God. From all these things they are utterly estranged, who give themselves up to the pleasures of sensuality. The Greek word rendered “living in pleasure,” refers to a course of living, intemperate, irregular, and dissolute;—in the opinion of Dr. Whitby, to drinking strong and costly liquors. The gratifications of intemperance with their usual accompaniments, are deemed essential to a life of pleasure. Any one vice indeed, when it becomes predominant,

will draw to its standard and enlist under its banner a long train of kindred vices. Whoever falls under the dominion of any one sin, will, in the issue, become the servant of sin in general. The intemperate person cannot, for any length of time, confine himself to this one evil habit. His subjection to this will constrain him to associate with it many other habits equally evil and vicious. It will be next to impossible for him to refrain from joining company with those who are men of strength to mingle strong drink. With them he will tarry long at the wine, till he be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, till all his bad passions are inflamed, and he is prepared to run to an excess of riot. With the complicated vices of his associates he will be soon infected. His eyes will behold strange women, and habits of lewdness, gaming, profaneness, and the hardened contempt of all the rules of decency and sobriety, will succeed and follow in the train of intemperance. They who abandon themselves to any of their sensual passions, may lay their account for a complete depravation of character in the end. Their immoderate love of pleasure will betray them into expenses beyond their income. To support their extravagance and prodigality, dishonourable methods of gain will become necessary. To cover these, recourse must be had to the arts of dissimulation and falsehood. One instance of falsehood must be cloaked by an-

other, and one act of fraud must be supported by another; "till in the end, there arises a character of complicated vice, of luxury shooting forth into baseness, dishonesty, injustice, and perhaps cruelty."

Thus a life of pleasure is an entrance on a course of general vice and wickedness. If it does not, in every instance, produce all that complicated guilt now described, yet it is always attended with spiritual death, with the habitual neglect of God and religion, with a distaste for the pleasures of devotion and an indifference about moral and spiritual attainments. They whose principal attention and concern are taken up either in adorning or pampering their bodies, find no leisure to attend to the interests of their souls. Improvement in knowledge, truth, and virtue, is as necessary to the health and happiness of the mind, as daily food is to the support and welfare of the body. But the nobler part of their nature is wholly neglected by those who "make provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts." Their thoughts and their pursuits are wholly engrossed by "the pleasures of sin." "In the service of divers lusts," those talents are prostituted, which ought to be employed in serving God and their generation. That time and those opportunities which ought to be most diligently improved in securing their eternal interests, are all squandered in the indulgence of mean and sordid appetites, in a perpetual hunt after sensual gratifi-

cations. With their whole hearts they despise and hate whatever is spiritual, heavenly, and divine. They cannot endure even the instrumental duties of religion, and studiously shun all the forms of devotion. In sensual joys is their whole delight, and they are in a measure listless and stupid in the intervals between one indulgence and another. Walking after the flesh and alive only to their lusts, their carnal mind is enmity against God, "not subject to his law, nor indeed can be." If then to be "carnally minded is death," as the Scripture expressly affirms, they who live in pleasure, enslaved to their lusts, are already dead, spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and sins. To all the most valuable purposes of life they are dead; or if they be said to live, it is in contradiction to the nature which God has given them, and the ends for which he made them. They may, it is true, as animals, breathe and move, walk upon the earth and see the light of heaven, eat and drink, attend scenes of amusement, and go on parties of pleasure, pass the night in revelling and the day in dozing. But in these respects what pre-eminence have they over the beasts that perish? Is this the life of a rational, moral being, the heir of eternity, a creature formed in the image of the Creator, with a capacity to know and imitate his moral perfections?

If we would so live as to answer the great purposes of life, we must live to the honour of our

Maker, to the benefit of our fellow-creatures, and so as to secure our own most substantial and durable felicity. In the total neglect of these objects, must we not be dead while we live, dead to God, to society, and to our own most valuable interests? Can they who live in sensual pleasure live to God? Alas! he is not in all their thoughts. They live as if there were no God. To themselves, to their own consciences, they cannot justify their manner of life, but on the principles of atheism. To God, then, they are dead, as they yield no fruit to his honour, no praise to his name; nay, worse than dead, as their whole lives are a continued series of dishonour to him, of reproach to his perfections, of rebellion against his laws, of insult to his government, of defiance to his justice and the power of his anger.

Do they live to the public? Are they blessings to the world and useful to society? On the contrary, are not drunkards, gamblers, idlers, spend-thrifts, with every description of sensualists and voluptuaries, so many nuisances in the world, the corrupters of good morals and manners, the ring-leaders in vice and licentiousness, the bane of every community,—infectious and pestilential wherever they reside?

To their virtuous relations and friends they are also dead, and worse than dead. What complicated misery and wretchedness overwhelm the wife

who has the misfortune of being united to a husband of their character ! What loathing and disgust must the husband feel towards a wife who is either unchaste or intemperate ! If virtuous and reputable children see either their father or their mother infamous for any vice, is it possible to depict their blush of confusion, their shame mingled with anguish and grief ? What parent would not rather follow his children to the grave, than see them dissolute and licentious, devoted to pleasure and enslaved to vice ? What satisfaction or comfort can brethren and sisters have in one of their family who is thus lost to virtue ? In what respect or esteem can the sottish creature be held by his neighbours around him ?

As they who live in pleasure are thus dead to God, to their fellow creatures, and their friends ; so are they with respect to their own best interests and welfare. It has been observed already that they are spiritually dead. This however, we have reason to fear, may be the melancholy case with many others besides the sensual and intemperate—of some who, notwithstanding their spiritual death, do yet possess strong powers of intellect and live in great distinction among men, acting an important part in the affairs of the world, shining on the public theatre as heroes and statesmen, or ranking high in the schools of learning and philosophy. Yet it is certain, that by habits of pleasure and

sensual indulgence, when continued for any time, the faculties of such men may be, and too often are, so impaired and benumbed, so weakened and stupified, as totally to destroy their eminence, disqualifying them for any office of trust, any station of honour, and indeed for any public appearance. In fact, when thus debilitated and debased, they are no longer fit to be seen in the land of the living. To all sober and decent people, their minds, after being drenched in sensuality, become as offensive, as their bodies will be after they shall be physically dead. When young persons fall into such habits, though ever so sprightly and promising before, their improvements are at once at an end. Henceforward their talents are wrapped in a napkin or buried in the earth. They no longer encourage the hopes of their friends or the expectations of the public. Whatever in them was splendid and shining before, is now lost in a cloud. The morning of their days is overcast; and the remainder of their lives drags on through an untimely decay, enveloped in mist and gloom.

With this loss of all energy of mind, they also lose a regard for reputation, and become strangely insensible to both praise and blame. Though the praise of men ought never to be our ruling motive, yet it is undoubtedly a subordinate consideration with those whose ultimate aim is the divine approbation. From this latter principle the former nat-

urally arises and is inseparable. They whose chief desire is to stand approved in the sight of the infinitely wise and good God, cannot be indifferent to the approbation of wise and good men. Even in those who neither regard God as they ought, nor properly distinguish among men from what altar the incense of praise arises, there is yet a general love of it, which has a mighty influence upon their conduct. They are continually asking themselves, what will the world think or say of such an action? and if they have been occasionally betrayed into the commission of any thing disgraceful, a sense of shame overwhelms them. This passion in our nature is placed as one of the guards of virtue, or at least, as a powerful restraint to vice. It grows with our growth, and is universal, unless rooted out by violence against nature. But such violence is done by the love of vicious pleasure and its continued indulgence; which gradually extirpate, not only all the principles of virtue, but all sense of honour, all regard for character. Besotted by their lusts, and working greedily "all manner of uncleanness," as natural brute beasts, men cease to "be ashamed, neither can they blush." Nay, sneering at whatever is modest and decent, in defiance of the opinions of all civilized people, they glory in their shame, and boast of their impurities. They cannot be ignorant of the general weight of censure which they have brought upon themselves,

yet so far "past feeling" are they, that they seem not in the least burdened or depressed. "They have made their brow as brass, and their neck as an iron sinew."

With respect to their worldly interests, no less than to their reputation, they are either dead or evidently dying. As a warning to all who wish to escape the evils of poverty, the wisest of men has left these maxims on record: "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man." "The drunkard and glutton shall come to poverty." "They who follow after vain persons, shall have poverty enough." Numerous examples verifying these maxims every where occur. Of all the causes of poverty in every country, none are so general and efficacious as intemperance, luxury, and a round of vain and idle company. Through these means we daily see the fairest and most ample patrimonies squandered, and their young possessors sinking from affluence to want, from an elevated condition into one made up of meanness, penury, and contempt. Where these causes are but partially admitted, they produce their effects in a proportionable degree. You can scarcely think of an individual within the circle of your acquaintance, addicted to either of these vices, whose affairs are not under a kind of blast, occasioned by his bosom iniquity.

They who live in pleasure, sacrifice not only their characters and estates, but even their healths

and lives. If during their fits of intoxication no fatality sends them drunk into eternity, they soon bring upon themselves such a complication of bodily infirmities, that, while suffering and wasting away under them, they are not unfrequently in a measure dead, long before their breath is gone. Our constitutions are formed but for moderate and regular enjoyments. Intemperance and excess always injure them, and hasten on their decay and dissolution. Colds, surfeits, indigestions, pleurisies, consumptions, dropsies, rheumatisms, apoplexies, with many other alarming and mortal diseases, are in the train of late hours, sleepless nights, lust, debauchery, and riot. How many thousands and thousands of well formed, robust young people, before they have attained to the meridian of their days, have broken down their strength, and fallen untimely, and, alas! unpitied martyrs to these follies and vices! In those instances where they have not produced such speedy destruction, they have sapped the foundations of life, withered its bloom, exhausted its spirits, and left their wretched devotees in bitterness to linger out the remainder of their days, pining monuments of youthful profligacy.

Dreadful as are these consequences of vicious pleasure, the melancholy detail ends not with the present life. All the proofs of future existence,

whether from reason or revelation, are so many proofs of a second death, of future misery without end, in reserve for the openly vicious. Many have been the controversies concerning principles of faith, and the nature of those spiritual qualifications which entitle to life eternal hereafter. Different sects and denominations have expressed their apprehension and concern for what might be the fate of their respective opponents at the great day. How often has the question been asked, whether the man who believes this or disbelieves that, can be saved ! But amidst these doubts on other subjects, nearly all denominations of Christians, and even the wiser heathen with them, have agreed that there can be no hope in a future state for impenitent, unreformed sensualists ; that a life of vicious pleasure in this world must be followed with misery in the next ; that “ what a man soweth, that he must reap ;” that “ they who sow to the flesh” here, must “ of the flesh reap corruption hereafter ;” that “ the wages of sin is death”—the second death. With this horrible prospect beyond the grave, made indubitably certain by the vices in which he has indulged, what must be the situation of the once gay man of pleasure, in the season of languishing illness and in the near view of approaching death ? Such a season will infallibly arrive. His intemperance and excess will hasten it on, shorten his days, and bring death more speedily to his door.

Nay, the period may be probably nigh at hand, when a complication of bodily disorders shall seclude him from the world, from all the objects and pursuits on which his thoughts are now dissipated, from his bewitching amusements, infidel associates, and sensual pleasures; when he shall be given up a prey to his own reflections, to the anguish of a self-condemning mind, and the terrors of an awakened conscience, forestalling his final doom. Heretofore he has been accustomed to act in a crowd, and had partners in every scene; but now he is left to act alone the last sad, solemn scene.

Of what avail is a life of pleasure, if it thus embitters death, plants thorns on the dying pillow, and pierces the bosom with anguish and despair? If it does not always present this spectacle of horror to its wretched votary, the reason is, because the sensualist is "dead, while he yet lives,"—because his sensibility is destroyed, and his faculties are so benumbed and stupified, that he is no longer capable of reflection. But surely in the eye of reason and religion, the reality of his danger and the dreadfulness of his situation, are not the less, on account of his stupidity, the reprobate state of his mind, and the searedness of his conscience.

In setting before you, my hearers, these effects and consequences of sensual indulgence, dreadful and alarming as they are, it can scarcely be hoped that any lasting impression will be made upon those

whose habits of vice are already fixed. For who or what can alter the skin of the Æthiop, or take out the spots of the leopard? But may it not be hoped that some who have been only occasionally seduced, may henceforward be deterred from the paths of the sorceress, and put upon their guard against the allurements of guilty pleasure? In special, may it not be hoped that those young people among us who are as yet in a measure uncorrupted, will receive the warning, and by fleeing youthful lusts and their attendant pollutions, preserve their innocence? Should temptation assail you, my young friends, should sensual pleasure, that enchanting harlot, spread her allurements for you,—will you not call to mind what you have now heard of the dreadful calamities which follow her footsteps? Will you not remember that by being taken in her embraces, you will be despoiled of your health, of your substance, of your reputation, of your energy and peace of mind, of all solid comfort and enjoyment, as well as of all usefulness in life and of all hope in death? “For her house is the way to hell, and her feet go down to the second death.”

As your period of age peculiarly exposes you to her snares, the greater vigilance and circumspection are necessary to your safety. You cannot look with an eye of too great suspicion on that flowery path where death lies in ambush. You cannot be too cautious of that company, of those

places and occasions, amusements and habits, by which many others have been gradually seduced and ruined. Above all things, avoid idleness. Never suffer yourselves, under any pretence, to saunter or trifle away your time. Let every day, and every hour of the day, be spent in improving your minds or your circumstances, or in being useful to others. Pursue with unremitting diligence your professional studies and the business of your respective callings in life. Establish habits of industry. They who are always engaged in worthy and laudable pursuits, are generally out of the way of temptation.

Let me entreat you, finally, to accompany your other precautions with a spirit of devotion to God. The quickening influence of his grace will effectually secure you. For "the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death."

SERMON XV.

—
TO THE YOUNG.

—
LUKE ii. 52.

*And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and
in favour with God and man.*

WITH these words it is proposed to introduce a discourse to children and youth; and call their attention to an example the most worthy of their imitation. In the life of Christ, we behold an exemplification of whatever is amiable and excellent in a human character. To set such a model before us was undoubtedly a part of the design of his mission. It is indeed but little that is recorded of him during the interval from his birth to his entrance on his public ministry. Yet this little is sufficient to satisfy us, that, through this early period of his age, he conducted with perfect propriety, made a rapid progress in all those accomplishments which dignify and adorn our rational nature; and by his proficiency in these things, is

a pattern after which it is the duty, and will be the wisdom and honour, of all young persons most diligently to copy. How much is implied in the brief account which St. Luke gives of his youthful years in the text! "He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

My young friends, can you think of any thing more excellent or more desirable, than to be what the Evangelist here affirms your Saviour was at your age? Do you not wish, that, as your bodies increase in stature and rise towards maturity, so your minds may improve in wisdom and knowledge, in all those intellectual, religious, and moral attainments, which will at once recommend you to the favour of God, your adorable Creator, and to the esteem and regard of your fellow-men?

If you aspire at these attainments, if so noble an ambition glow in your bosoms, let me remind you,

First, How necessary it is, that piety to God be the ruling principle of your hearts and lives—that your heavenly Father be the object of your supreme respect, and his approbation your chief and ultimate aim. We are no sooner capable of knowing God, than we ought to feel our obligations thus to regard him. To love him with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, is the first and great command. The life of Christ was a continued series of perfect obedience to this most

comprehensive precept. In his early childhood, piety and devotion were his prevailing temper; and continued to be more and more displayed as he advanced in the progress of life. It was by the exercise and display of such a temper, by his cheerful and unreserved obedience to the divine will, and his growing delight in holding converse with his heavenly Father, that he so speedily advanced into peculiar favour with the Almighty. All this is evidently implied in the language of the text. But in the preceding context, we have a remarkable instance of the warmth and zeal for the divine honour and service, which possessed and animated his youthful mind. He was but twelve years old when his parents took him with them in their annual journey to celebrate the pass-over at Jerusalem. With the solemnities of this religious festival, and the sacred entertainments of the temple, he was so charmed and delighted, that, in the enjoyment of them, he seemed to forget all other objects and concerns. At the end of the days of unleavened bread, his parents set out on their return home, and supposing him to be in the company of their acquaintance, had proceeded a day's journey before they were convinced that he was really missing. With no small anxiety they went back, solicitously inquiring and searching for him. On the third day, to their joyful surprise, they discovered him in an apartment of the temple,

where young persons were accustomed to attend the lectures given by the learned teachers of the divine law. To the reprehensive expostulations of his mother on that occasion, he gave this memorable answer,—“Wherefore did ye seek me with such anxiety? Did ye not know that I ought to be at my Father’s house, or busy in his service?” What attachment to God and divine things, must have possessed the heart of the child who was capable of making such a reply! How wholly devoted must he have been to the concerns of religion and the glory of God!

Opposite as these things are to the prevailing disposition of young persons in general, it may not be amiss for them seriously to ask themselves, whether this example of their blessed Redeemer be not worthy of their imitation;—whether something of the same pious and devout temper in them would not be perfectly suitable to their relation to God as his rational offspring, to the obligations they are under to him for his innumerable mercies, and to their hopes and expectations from him as probationers for eternity.

Tell me, children and youth, when, in remembering your Creator, you think of the beautiful and well formed bodies which he has given you, the understanding and reason with which he has inspired you, the spacious and well furnished world in which he has placed you, the daily pro-

vision which his providence makes for your support, comfort, and pleasure ; and above all, the eternal redemption of your souls by the sufferings and death of his Son ;—when you review these your obligations to God, do not reason and conscience call you, and the ingenuity of your nature prompt you, to all possible returns of love and gratitude ? Must you not feel your obligations to make him the object of your supreme affection and entire devotion ? And if, with your whole heart, you thus love God, will you not, of course, love religion, and make conscience of all its various duties ? Will you not, like your Saviour, love the house, the day, and all the ordinances of God ? Will you not delight in prayer and praise, beginning and closing each successive day with acts of devotion ; and by this continual intercourse with your heavenly Father, tread in the steps of him who has gone before you in the journey of life, that he might show you the way to grow in favour both with God and the people of God ? But again,

Secondly, When it is said, in the text, of the child Jesus, that he “grew in wisdom,” the intimation is, that he made an extraordinary proficiency in knowledge, especially in the knowledge of religion. We are led to conceive of him as discovering early marks of a sublime and heavenly genius, and as being distinguished, while yet a child, for rare and eminent attainments in knowl-

edge and piety. As the grace of God was upon him in an extraordinary manner, it was no doubt through supernatural assistance, that he so early attained to an unrivalled eminence in intellectual and spiritual accomplishments.

But whatever communications he received from above, yet he diligently attended those means of information and instruction, which were open to others, and by which it was intended that the youth in general should be trained up for usefulness in this world, and happiness in the next. He omitted no opportunity, in this way, to increase his stock of knowledge. In his first visit to the temple just mentioned, he took his place among other youths at the feet of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And so just and pertinent were his answers, and such discernment and penetration appeared in the questions which he put on that occasion, that all who heard him were in a transport of admiration at the understanding which he discovered.

My young friends, what a charming, what a most alluring example is here presented for your imitation! Do you not feel an ambition to copy after the holy child Jesus, in those mental improvements by which human beings are distinguished from every other species of creatures on this earth? Are you not desirous, like your blessed Saviour, to excel in knowledge? Look on those parts of

the earth which are left wild and uncultivated ! Compare their barren state, or their useless growth, with the gardens, orchards, fields, and meadows, which are all flourishing under the improvements of husbandry. In the one, you have often a spectacle of horror ; in the other, a most lovely, cheerful, and delightful prospect. Be assured, the difference is not less striking and manifest between those children who grow up in ignorance, vice, and superstition, and those who are trained up in all the branches of useful science, and in the knowledge of true religion. Instinct is sufficient to direct the beasts, the birds, and fishes to the end for which they are made ; but the human race are to attain this end through the exercise of reason, availing itself of all the aid and assistance within its reach. In children, the powers of reason are at first feeble, and unless guided by instruction, and strengthened by virtuous education, are often overborne by those headstrong passions and lusts which issue in their ruin. Great care, strict discipline, and much instruction are requisite, to form young minds to a proper degree of knowledge in the things pertaining to their present temporal interest ; and to those habits of industry, prudence, economy, sobriety, and publicspiritedness which are necessary to their passing reputably through life. Education in these things, makes that amazing distinction which is visible between civilized nations and the wild savages of the desert.

But of all knowledge, that of true religion is infinitely the most important. Children, from their early infancy, begin by degrees to manifest a principle within them, which will not be extinguished with the flame of animal life. The looks which they raise towards heaven, and the tears which bedew their cradle, speak them allied to the world of spirits. The light of nature as well as revelation, proclaims them the heirs of immortality, cast upon this earth to act a part which shall fit them for endless weal or wo hereafter. They no sooner begin to act as accountable creatures than they set out on a journey to heaven or to hell. How amazing is the difference between these two directions! How inconceivably interesting must it be, in which of them they proceed! What wisdom can be comparable to that which prompts them to attend to the things which belong to their everlasting peace, and to walk in the way which leads to heavenly felicity? If they are seen thus early entering the strait gate, and walking in the narrow way; remembering their Creator, seeking the knowledge of him, and consecrating themselves to his service; how peculiarly acceptable will they be in his sight, and in what estimation will they be held by the wise and good among men!

Thirdly, If children and youth would, like their blessed Redeemer, grow in favour with God and man, it is also necessary that they follow the exam-

ple which he has set them of filial duty and obedience. Though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet after he had condescended to take upon him the form a servant, and appear in fashion as a man—being in his human nature a child born, having a real mother and a reputed father,—to these his earthly parents, he never in any instance failed of paying all due submission and respect. What has been just noticed of his tarrying behind at Jerusalem, after they had set out on their return home, was most probably in obedience to the will of his heavenly Father, and by his special direction. This seems to be implied in his answer to the expostulations of his mother on that occasion. The Evangelist leaves no room for suspecting him of disregarding the parental authority, when he goes on to inform us, that “he went down with them to Nazareth, and continued subject unto them,” through the period of his minority. And that he never, through his whole life, ceased his filial attention and respect, may be conclusively inferred from the tender and affectionate manner, in which, at his death, he committed his mother to the care of his beloved disciple St. John. Amidst all the exquisite tortures of the cross, seeing his mother and this disciple standing by, “he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son. Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother. And from that hour

that disciple took her to his own home." Can language describe, or imagination conceive, a scene more tender and affecting, or a stronger expression of filial regard?

What he was in this respect, his religion requires all his disciples to be. It expressly enjoins: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Obey them in all things; for this is well pleasing to the Lord." To his own amiable example, his high authority is added, to render us steady and persevering in the discharge of filial duty. During the period of childhood, this duty consists in a ready and implicit submission to the parental will. Through the tender age, and before children have arrived to years of discretion, it is in itself proper and fit that their inclinations should be restrained, and their employments directed, by the superior wisdom of their parents.

After they have reached maturity, if they continue voluntary members of their father's family, they are bound to conform to its regulations, and contribute to its support. Through life indeed, filial gratitude will be expressed, and show itself in compliances with the will of parents in whatever is lawful and consistent with the child's own happiness—"in a constant endeavour to promote their enjoyments, prevent their wishes, and soften their anxieties; in waiting upon their sickness or decrepitude; in bearing with the infirmities of

their health or temper, with the peevishness and complaints, the unfashionable, negligent, austere manners, and offensive habits, which attend upon advanced years; for where must old age find indulgence, if it does not meet with it in the piety and partiality of children?"

Nor will all this be thought too much by that child, who remembers his obligations to those tender and affectionate parents, who nursed his infancy, watched over his childhood, guided his youth; and with incessant care and anxiety for his welfare, carried him on through the several stages of education, till at length they introduced him to the world, with every advantage which it was in their power to give. Can such benefits be repaid? Can any returns be equal to the obligations received? Must not those children be unnatural monsters, who requite them with undutifulness, ingratitude, and contempt? Will not such impiety be avoided by all who hope for the favour of God, or wish for the esteem of men? In what way can any give so decisive a proof of an ingenious and amiable temper, as by being distinguished for their dutifulness, for their submissive, respectful, and affectionate behaviour towards their parents?

Fourthly, When it is said, in the text, of the child Jesus, that "he grew in favour with God and man," we are led to conceive of him as early

distinguished and eminent for the virtues of diligence, humility, modesty, meekness, moderation, truth, and benevolence. In each of these respects, young persons should consider him as their model and great exemplar. From the poverty of his parents and his subjection to them, we have reason to believe that his youthful days were industriously spent in labouring for the common support of the family. He probably embraced the occupation of his supposed father, and through all the earlier stages of his life, to the period of his public ministry, prosecuted the laborious employment of a carpenter.

Such are the circumstances of our situation in the present world, that more than nine tenths of mankind are obliged to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. Their most necessary affairs, and the business of their respective trades and callings, cannot be carried on without a degree of hard labour. It is the study of many persons to shun as much of this as possible. But if the son of God, when he had become the son of man, did not decline it, if he submitted with his own hands to work at one of our most ordinary and toilsome occupations, is it becoming or decent in us to disdain any service to which we are called by the lot assigned us in the world? To what purpose are our hands and strength of body, if they are not to be applied to labour? Though our condition

should be so affluent, as to set us above the necessity of working for our subsistence; yet we cannot be excused from diligence in some useful employment or profession. Idleness and sloth are in themselves vicious, the inlets of temptation, and the source of those manifold corruptions which defile the mind, injure the body, and bring on a general depravation of character. The improvement of our minds, our general usefulness in the world, and proficiency in moral goodness, render habits of industry indispensably incumbent upon every one. Nothing is of greater importance in the education of youth, than the early inuring of them to such habits. Constant exercise and employment will strengthen all their faculties, both of body and mind. And by diligence and ardour in prosecuting the great purposes of life, the duties both of their civil calling and of their christian character, they will become qualified for the trust and confidence of their fellow-creatures, and for the favour and approbation of their Maker.

But, my young friends, your blessed Redeemer was not only diligent, but humble, modest, meek, and moderate with respect to all worldly objects and enjoyments. The principles of these virtues, which were so admirably displayed through the whole tenor of his life, must have had their foundation in his early youth. They grew up with him from his very infancy, and increased the lustre of his

character more and more, in proportion as his faculties opened, and he came forward to take a part in the intercourse of society. In him, while yet a child, there appeared nothing in the least savouring of pride and vanity; nothing pert, forward, or assuming; nothing peevish, hasty, rash, or resentful; no violence of passion; no unruliness of appetite; no sullenness of temper; no marks of discontent or of dissatisfaction; he uttered no murmuring word; he indulged no repining thoughts; he expressed no desire for any thing improper for him. From all these things, which are the common spots and blemishes in the character of other children, the holy child Jesus was perfectly free. Possessing an entire equanimity, he was always easy and contented with whatever was allotted him—always calm, serene, and undisturbed, whatever restraints were imposed upon him, whatever provocations were offered him, or whatever accidents befell him. In patience he possessed his soul on every occasion. Though he was the great, the promised Messiah, the son of God, and heir of all things, yet he claimed none of the prerogatives which might seem due to his high dignity. Instead of being ministered unto, he condescended to minister to others, and became the servant of all. With an understanding and genius which astonished the doctors of the temple, and which might easily have eclipsed all the most

celebrated poets, orators, and philosophers of the world, and procured him the highest worldly distinction, he forebore all views of the kind; and that he might fulfil the duties of the humble rank assigned him by infinite wisdom, he passed his youth in obscurity, amidst the difficulties and labours of poverty.

Tell me, children, are you not charmed with the beauties of this most amiable, most lovely character? Can you wonder that such a youth became the favourite of both God and man? If, then, you admire his virtues, will you not strive to imitate them? Will you not take him for your model, and study to be as nearly as possible what he was? Are you not conscious of dispositions in yourselves very different and opposite to the meek, humble, patient, and submissive temper of your blessed Redeemer? Have not your actions and expressions on several occasions, been very different from what such a temper would have dictated? Do you not blush to remember these your imperfections? Will you not, with the utmost vigilance and resolution, endeavour to correct and avoid them for the future,—daily praying to God for the assistance of his grace, to render your endeavours successful?

Among the various excellencies in the character of Jesus, which I am recommending to your imitation, you must remember that his sincerity, truth, and benevolence are not the least. He was

truth itself, in whose heart no thought of deceit was ever conceived, and in “whose mouth no guile was ever found.” In this respect, while he dwelt among men on earth, we beheld in him the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person. In proportion to our abhorrence of every species of falsehood and deceit, and to the strength of our attachment to truth and strict observance of it in all our words and actions, will be our resemblance to God and Christ. I will not wound the feelings of my young auditors, by supposing them capable of bringing upon themselves the debasement, the odium, guilt, and deformity inseparable from a habit of falsehood. May I not hope, that by having their conversation at all times in simplicity and godly sincerity, they will show themselves to be “Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile?”

Children and youth, your character for whatever is amiable and excellent will be complete, if, with the particulars already mentioned, you are also careful to imitate the compassion and benevolence of your Redeemer. In no son or daughter of Adam before or since, were ever found such sweetness of disposition, such kindness of heart, such generosity of soul, such readiness to every humane, every benevolent action and office,—such delight in doing good. While he was yet a child, and during the privacy of his youth, his bosom glow-

ed with the same good will to men, which was afterwards displayed in his public ministry, when, through its whole course, he “went about doing good.” Nay, it was love, surprising, astonishing love, which, inducing the son of God to become the son of man, animated him in all he did and in all he suffered, from his birth in a manger, to his death on the cross. His motive to all this, was our salvation, our deliverance from the second death, and exaltation to life eternal in heaven. By the whole tenor of his religion, he says to us, and by all the hopes which his religion sets before us, he enforces the saying, “Do to each other as I have done to you.—Love one another as I have loved you.”

My dear young friends, in proportion as you comply with these injunctions, and excel in the observance of them, as you thus tread in the steps, and copy the example of your benevolent Saviour; as your hearts expand in universal love and good will, and your lives are filled up with offices of kindness and acts of beneficence; you will grow in favour with God and man, be fashioned into the image of Christ, and through him become the adopted children of his heavenly Father, precious as jewels in his sight, and dear to him as the apple of his eye.

The subject of this discourse teaches fathers and mothers, heads of families, guardians, preceptors, tutors, all to whom the care of children is

committed, what should be the great object constantly aimed at in their education, namely, to form them into a resemblance of Christ—to the knowledge and to the practice of his religion. This is the only sure foundation on which their present and future happiness can be built. All other knowledge, all other accomplishments, are nothing in comparison with this. May our care and attention in this respect, bear some proportion to its infinite importance !

My associates in this weighty concern, you who share with me in the charge of the rising generation, let me remind you and myself that nothing will have so happy a tendency to impress on the minds of our children the instructions now inculcated, as the exemplification of them in our own lives. The advice now given to them, in almost every particular, is applicable to ourselves, and as essential to our happiness as it is to theirs. Nor will they believe that we are in earnest in urging it upon them, if we neglect it ourselves. But if they see us putting on Christ, making him our model, conforming our temper, conversation, and conduct to his example, transcribing the excellencies of his character into our own, and adorning our lives with the virtues and graces of his religion,—their regard for us will be an additional motive to them to join with us in following our common Lord and Saviour. May God of his infinite mercy

grant that we may all, both parents and children, so follow him as to be owned by him hereafter, and welcomed into those mansions which he is gone to prepare, that where he is, we may be also !

SERMON XVI.

TO THE AGED.

2 SAMUEL xix. 34—37.

And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem?

I am this day fourscore years old; and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing-men and singing-women? Wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?

Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king; and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward?

Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother.

IN this account which Barzillai gives of himself, we have at once a natural and a most pleasing description of discreet and virtuous old age. This re-

spectable personage, amidst the general rebellion of his countrymen, had steadily persevered in his allegiance to the government of his sovereign ; and being very rich, had furnished the fugitive king, during the period of his distress and exile, with the most important supplies. The rebellion was now at an end, and the lately abandoned monarch was returning home in triumph to his capital, amidst the general joy and acclamations of that very people who, but a few days or weeks before, had joined against him in battle array. At this happy turn of the public affairs, the heart of Barzillai leaped for joy ; and old as he was, he made a great effort to join in the general congratulations to his lawful sovereign. So just and pious a prince as David, could not forget the obligations which he had received from so faithful and generous a subject. He was in haste to requite them in a princely manner. At the first sight of this old friend, he instantly proposed that he should accompany him to his palace, and there spend the remainder of his days in the pleasures, amusements, and splendour of the court.

To this proposal our text is the answer. “ Barzillai said unto the king, how long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem ? I am this day fourscore years old.” What thoughtfulness and consideration, what gravity and wisdom are implied in this language ! How very different from the weakness, if not sinfulness betrayed by

many persons advanced in years, who seem loath to remember themselves, and afraid that others should know, how old they are ! This they industriously conceal as a secret which, if divulged, might expose them to contempt, or debar them of pleasures in which they still choose to partake. While draining out the dregs of life and waiting the fall of a few remaining sands in their glass, they seem anxious to have it thought that they are still in their prime ; as capable as ever, either of the business or of the pleasures of the world. The dignity, authority, and respectability which nature has attached to old age when honourably supported, these foolish persons “ resign for that absurd affectation of youth, which can only render them ridiculous.” While they are as eager as ever in their worldly pursuits, or as constant as ever in attending scenes of amusement, of mirth, and gaiety, in adopting the fashion of present times and affecting the airs and manners of youth—their hoary locks, furrowed brows, and tottering steps, are visible to all but themselves.

Contrasted with characters like these, how rational and dignified are the language and sentiments of Barzillai ! Standing on the utmost boundary of human life, he chooses to keep the closing scene constantly in view, and dreads that change of situation in which he might for a moment lose sight of it. “ How long have I to live, that I should go

up with the king to Jerusalem?" It would be wholly unbecoming my advanced years to mingle in the gaieties and splendour of a court, or to undertake the duties of any of the great offices of state. As "I am this day fourscore years old," to the present generation I am in a great measure a stranger. The most of my contemporaries have been long since numbered with the dead. The shades of my former friends and acquaintance seem to hover around me and beckon me to follow them. My age and growing infirmities require that I should be wholly disentangled from public affairs and but rarely appear on any public occasion. Retirement, solitude, and serious meditation on that world to the borders of which I have made so near an approach, are now my duty. While I gratefully acknowledge, I must crave permission to decline, the kind invitation of my sovereign, as nature has rendered me incapable of enjoying the happiness which it proposes. "Can I any longer discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing-men and singing-women? Wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king; and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother."

With what perfect approbation do we read these sentiments of the good old man! Who does not applaud his resolution in declining the offers of the king? And how just and natural is his attachment to the city of his father's sepulchre, and his desire to be buried by the grave of his father and his mother! The general tenor of his speech on this occasion leads the mind to serious reflection, and to the contemplation of various scenes and objects of pleasing melancholy. It sets before us an affecting picture of what must terminate the journey of the most prosperous and successful passengers through this life. However fortunate their course may be, whatever gratifications and comforts may be experienced in the early and middle stages; yet infelicities are inseparable from some of its last scenes, and the conclusion is always gloomy to the apprehension of the living. We rarely see an example of fourscore years attended with so many agreeable circumstances as this of Barzillai; yet he himself assures us that many evils encompassed and oppressed him, from which he had no prospect of relief but in the grave.

There are, however, considerations which seem to render the surviving to old age desirable. That this desire is general in mankind, needs no proof. Its strength and fervency are felt by us all. It arises from the first and strongest principle in our nature, the principle of self-preservation. Nor are we at

a loss for specious reasons to justify the cherishing of such a desire. Though we cannot pretend to immortality in the present world, and our reason can furnish no argument on which to found such a pretence or wish; yet, when we see all things around us in the vegetative and animal creation, having their distinct seasons for growth, maturity, and gradual decay; the desire of passing through each of these seasons ourselves, and of arriving at our end in the path thus marked out by this universal law, seems both natural and rational. In old people this desire is gratified, and they ought to be peculiarly thankful for an indulgence which is afforded to but few comparatively. Nay at this period "there ought to be a satiety of life, as there is of all other things;" and death, instead of being thought of with horror, should be expected as a welcome release from a long and tedious pilgrimage in a foreign country. For what more can nature or reason prompt us to wish, than "to come to the grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in its season?"

Our natural desire of reaching this last stage of human existence, is strengthened by all those objects and concerns which make up our chief interest and happiness in the present world. To accumulate property, educate our children, establish them in families, secure an easy and comfortable situation for ourselves, and see our posterity increas-

ing and flourishing around us—are natural, and, when duly moderated, rational and innocent desires. As a life protracted to the common age of man is usually necessary in order to the attainment of these objects, the latter are of course, so many additional motives inducing us to wish for length of days. A premature death would blast all our temporal hopes and expectations, and pour contempt upon all our worldly projects and pursuits. As this often occurs, as melancholy examples of it are daily taking place, the few who, amidst the general wreck, are suffered to survive to old age, ought not to be insensible of the distinction in their favour. And if to length of days a series of worldly success and prosperity is added, such persons, with respect to temporal happiness, must be esteemed the most favoured of mortals. In each of these respects the citizen of Rogelim in the text, was remarkably blessed. As he had probably been, through the course of a long life, a man of great industry, prudence, and good management, he had become very rich. And he was never perhaps so sensible of the value of his riches, as when they enabled him to succour fallen greatness, relieve oppressed goodness and piety, and sustain the tottering liberties of his country in the person of a sovereign, the most worthy that had ever swayed the sceptre over any nation. When the opportunity occurred for such great and extensive usefulness, this good man found that his life

had not been prolonged in vain. He doubtless considered it as among the most eminent instances of the divine goodness to him, that he had at once an heart and ability to come forward on so great and urgent an occasion.

We may therefore add, that they who thus survive to old age, have thereby the opportunity of tasting more fully the goodness of God in the blessings of the present life, and of experiencing more largely the care and kindness of his universal providence. We all indeed, on our first entrance into life, are the objects of his care and receive all our supplies from his munificence. The guardianship which is exercised over our tender years, and the provision then made both for the nourishment and growth of our bodies, and for the education and improvement of our minds, ought, through our whole succeeding course, to be often recollected by us with the most grateful emotions. But it is certain that the longer we live, the more we receive from God. His mercies are multiplied upon us with the multiplied moments of our lives. They who live on to old age, must, of course, have the most abundant experience of his goodness. It is through help obtained from him, that they are enabled for such a course of years, to escape the shafts and arrows of death which are constantly flying around them. How oft must they have been in situations in which there was but a step

between them and death ! They cannot say from how many dangers they have been saved, of which they were not themselves aware, and at the time had not the least apprehension. As much is required of those to whom much is given, they who have been thus continually receiving, through the course of a long life, innumerable mercies, deliverances, and salvations from God—who have seen and experienced so much of his goodness, ought in a proportionable degree to rejoice in him, and feel the pleasing emotions of love and gratitude, of thanksgiving and praise.

But the consideration which, above all others, renders the surviving to old age desirable, is the opportunity which it affords for rising to higher degrees of religious knowledge, making greater attainments in christian piety, bringing forth more fruit to the glory of God and the benefit of our fellow-men, and by these means securing our title to, and qualifying ourselves for, life eternal in the coming world. As christians and probationers for eternity, we are constrained to view these as the great purposes for which life and time are given. In this view every day and hour are precious beyond all estimation. The indulgence of a long life is a privilege, the right or ill improvement of which will exceedingly enhance our future happiness or misery. Sincere christians are not insensible of this worth of time, considered in its relation to eternity. It

is their daily prayer and endeavour, the longer they live, the more to abound in the virtues and graces of their christian character and profession. And it may generally be supposed that, if they thus continue patient in well-doing from youth even to old age, all the principles of holiness in their hearts, and the habits of piety and goodness in their lives, will become more firm and established; that their hoary heads being thus found in the way of righteousness, will be crowned with peculiar glory and honour; and at death, being thus ripe in grace as well as in years, they will have an abundant entrance ministered unto them into the everlasting kingdom of their God and Saviour. What wise and good man would not wish thus to live and thus to die? How desirable is life protracted to old age, if it be thus spent in a preparation for death, in laying up in store for ourselves a good foundation for the hope of life eternal, in accumulating treasures in heaven and in making our calling and election sure! Such, my hearers, are the considerations which seem to justify our natural desire of living to old age.

But having viewed the bright, it is proper that we should look on the dark side of this so generally desired period, and revolve in our minds the considerations which should reconcile us to an earlier exit from this world, should such be the allotment of Providence. This is the more interesting to us, because we have incomparably greater reason to

fear the latter, than we have to hope for the former. In the lottery of life, but here and there one draws the prize of fourscore, or even of three score years and ten. To each one in middle age as well as in youth, an earlier death is far the most probable. If we be wise, it will be our endeavour to prepare ourselves to meet with calmness and resignation what we have so much reason to apprehend may be our destiny.

When we throw our thoughts forward to advanced years as a stage at which we desire and hope to arrive, our imagination overlooks all the painful vicissitudes and sufferings which may lie in the way, and paints the road as smooth and alluring, through a pleasant and well cultivated country, diversified with gentle hills and fruitful vales, refreshing streams and cooling shades; presenting here beautiful plantations, and there verdant groves; and along the whole extent, well furnished inns, and all the accommodations and delights that heart can wish. But, how different in the experience of the travellers, is the actual journey! Over what wild and dreary deserts and barren sands, are they obliged, loaded with care and anxiety, to drag their weary steps; at one time, enveloped in gloom; at another, opening their eyes on objects of dread; while winding their way through perplexed and intricate mazes, with craggy cliffs, hideous precipices, and dangerous pitfalls on every side. And if a

few of the weatherbeaten pilgrims reach at last the desired stage—alas! what is it? Life stripped of all its pleasures, cold, cheerless, and sinking in rapid and irreparable decay—a deserted cottage, tottering under the stormy blasts of winter! “Can I,” said old Barzillai, “any longer discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing-men and singing-women? Wherefore should I be yet a burden?” Such is the condition, and such the end of old age! Thus it proved to Barzillai, who, so far as we are able to judge, had reached it by a course more prosperous and fortunate than that of almost any other mortal.

For the sake of what objects then, my brethren, do we wish for length of days? Is it that we may become more sure of our title to heaven, and better prepared for that holy place? This is indeed a just and most reasonable concern—a matter infinitely interesting. They, however, who have such a feeling sense of it as to desire life principally for its sake, must of course be diligent and earnest in improving their present opportunities, in working out their salvation with fear and trembling; and the shortest life thus spent, will end well and safely. They who are thus employed will be found watching and ready at whatever hour their Lord shall come, whether at midnight, at the cockcrow-ing, or in the morning. But to what purpose do

they desire to live, by whom all this is disregarded? What are the aims of worldly men in wishing to survive to old age? You are engaged in business perhaps, and hope that in the course of a life extended to the common boundary, you may become distinguished for your riches. But know you not that these riches are uncertain, and that the hope and prospect of them are always precarious? Have you duly considered all the chances against you—the misfortunes, losses, and disappointments to which you lie open? How many as eager as yourselves in the same pursuit, have in the end seen the object of it eluding their grasp? But we would provide for our children, you will urge. Are you sure that those children may not die before you; or if they live, that they may not become profligate, and at last bring down your gray hairs with sorrow to the grave?

It is certain that in the course of a long life many sorrows and afflictions must overtake us. They who live to be old are compelled to see and hear many things which they would not—the loss of friends and relations, their own misfortunes and the distresses of others, troublesome times, and public commotions and confusions. Was not the heart of Barzillai wrung with anguish at the rebellion of Absalom? He well remembered the day when all Israel sang the praises of the conqueror of Goliath. He had witnessed the general

joy when this hero, with the suffrage of the nation, ascended the throne. He had seen the wisdom and rectitude of his government, and the unparalleled success and prosperity of the country under his administration. What then must have been his feelings, when the greater part of the people suddenly ran mad, and joined an unprincipled and ambitious son in attempting the parricide of such a father and such a prince? Alas! what a world is this, where whole nations are capable of such phrensy and wickedness! Of a similar nature are the scenes which continue to be exhibited on this great theatre. The longer we live, my brethren, the more we shall see and hear of them,—rebellions in one place, oppressions in another, the devastation of cities and countries, the groans of the vanquished and the triumphs of the vanquishers, accompanied with private vices and public follies every where over the face of the whole earth. Is it worth one's while to grow old in gazing at objects like these, in meditating upon them, inquiring, hearing, reading, and conversing about them—having, at the same time, all our passions of hope and fear, joy and sorrow, every moment exercised and agitated with their constantly varying prospect? Prepare us, good Lord, by thy spirit and grace, prepare us for an early dismissal from these scenes of confusion, misery, and guilt!

Old age is also a period in which we shall be in danger of losing, what Barzillai seems most admirably to have retained, the powers of reason and judgment. Whatever were the infirmities and decays of his body, he appears to have had the almost singular felicity of a mind unimpaired. This enabled him to conduct with a wisdom, dignity, and gravity, which must have commanded universal respect. But how few at his years are thus happy! How common is it for the mind to decay with the body, and sometimes become defunct, while the body still lives! The greatest wits and heroes have sunk into imbecility, and become idiots under the age of fourscore.

“From Marlborough’s eyes the streams of *détage* flow,
And Swift expires, a driveller and a show.”

If these evils should be in a good measure escaped; yet when men are destitute of true religion, old age but carries them on to higher degrees of guilt. The sinner being an hundred years old, dies at last under a curse heavy and dreadful in proportion to the extended duration of his guilt.

Thus it appears that the surviving to old age may be desirable or otherwise, according to the circumstances attending it. These circumstances being extremely precarious and not to be foreseen, we ought to indulge no solicitude upon the subject. Our times and the number of our months are not in our own hand. He who cannot err has set for

us all, the bounds which we cannot pass. If among those to whom a long life is allotted there be some who, like Barzillai, at fourscore seem happy and respected; there are, on the other part, many others who in the decline of life become extremely wretched.

May not this discourse teach those among us who are advancing towards old age, how to support the dignity and gravity of their declining years, and render their hoary heads honourable in the eyes of the world? This cannot be done by affecting to forget or endeavouring to conceal the number of their years, by imitating the levities of youth, or running into all the caprices of worldly fashion; by frequenting scenes of gaiety, by mingling with the crowd on public occasions, or by attempting show and parade.

My respected friends, you ought, like the aged citizen of Rogelim, to be sensible how unsuitable and incongruous these things are to your venerable standing in life. Keeping your minds unincumbered, and disentangled from the more perplexing cares of the world, with Barzillai, you should seek and love retirement; while like him, you continue your endeavours to be useful, and, in proportion to your abilities, abound in works of beneficence both to the bodies and souls of those around you. As your time and opportunities shorten, your diligence in all the offices of piety to God, and of charity to

men, should increase. Your age and experience authorize you to administer reproofs to the wicked, consolations to the afflicted, and good advice and instruction to the young and ignorant. On your influence, counsel, and example, the cause of religion, virtue, and good order, and the success among us of these greatest blessings to society, in no small degree depend. In no part of your lives were your exertions with respect to these objects, more likely to prove efficacious than at present. Do not imagine that you are become useless or unprofitable, while it is in your power to check or restrain, in any degree, vice and folly.

A total cessation from worldly business while you are able to transact it, is not recommended. It is wiser and better to continue your habits of industry in your accustomed vocations, so long as you are able to prosecute them ; though you may, and ought, perhaps, to relax your efforts, and contract the circle of your affairs in proportion as you may perceive the decline of your abilities ; gradually retiring from the noise and bustle of the world to domestic scenes and serious thoughts. As the decays of nature advance upon you, learn to bear them with patience and resignation. Being at length in a great measure disabled from worldly care and business, let a spirit of devotion and heavenly-mindedness have the possession of your hearts. “ Let your affections dwell among divine

and immortal objects. In silent and thoughtful meditation, walk as on the shore of that vast ocean, upon which you are so soon to embark. Summon up all the considerations, which should reconcile you to your departure from life, and which may prepare you for going through its last scene, with firmness and decency." When that crisis shall arrive, when, after having reached the utmost verge of life, you shall feel yourselves sinking under disease added to the infirmities of age ; still remember in whom you have believed, and endeavour to strengthen your confidence in him. While your flesh and heart are failing you, still think of him who is the strength of your heart and the portion of your soul, and say with the Psalmist, " Though I walk through the valley, and the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff, they shall comfort me."

SERMON XVII.

CHARACTER OF JOB.

JAMES v. 11.

*Ye have heard of the patience of Job ; and have
seen the end of the Lord.*

It has been the opinion of some learned men, that no such person as Job ever existed, and that the book containing his history was a parabolic fiction, invented indeed for a pious purpose, to subserve the cause of religion and virtue. Bishop Warburton considered it as a dramatic allegory, composed by Ezra for the consolation of the Jews returning from Babylon ; wherein, under the character of Job and his friends, are figured those Jews and their three great enemies, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. But it is certain that the history of Job was well known, and his character celebrated among the Jews, before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. Honourable mention is made of him in the prophecy of Ezekiel (xiv. 14), and he is there represented as a person, like Noah

and Daniel, of eminent and distinguished piety. He could not therefore have been a feigned, but a real character, as truly as Noah and Daniel. We are also led to the same conclusion by the Apostle's reference to him in the text. Against the express testimony of two inspired writers, it seems hardly allowable to doubt of the reality of his person, or of the truth of his history.

It may be more difficult precisely to ascertain the age in which he lived. As there is not through his whole book any reference to a written law of God, it seems probable that he lived in the patriarchal age, prior to Moses and the emancipation of the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage. With this hypothesis, the length of his life corresponds. As he survived his sufferings a hundred and forty years, his whole life could not have been less than two hundred—an age which well agrees with that of the patriarchs between Abraham and Moses. The land of Uz, in which he is said to have lived, is mentioned in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, as pertaining to the country possessed by the descendants of Esau, and is called Edom. One at least of Job's friends, Eliphaz, is supposed to have been of that family; but most commentators choose to consider Job himself as a descendant from Nahor, the brother of Abraham.

By whom his history was written, whether by himself, by Elihu, or any other of his friends, we

cannot form a conjecture. It carries with it evident marks of the remotest antiquity, and is perhaps the oldest book now extant in the world. That it was written near the times in which the events happened, cannot be doubted. Were we to suppose, as some have, an interval of ages while these things were handed down by oral tradition, their credibility would have been so diminished, that the Jews would not have received the book as canonical. It is inconceivable that Moses or any other Hebrew could have written it without referring to some or other of their national peculiarities, or at least without tracing the relation of Job to some of their ancestors. But as nothing of this sort occurs, and the book stands unconnected with, and independent of the whole Jewish history and system, it probably preceded any records of theirs which have reached modern times. The account of Job's possessions, the points of history, the rites of religion, and the forms of idolatry referred to in it, are all such as agree to the times which preceded the Mosaic institution.

The book assumes so much of a poetic form, that critics have called it a poem of the dramatic kind. The general argument seems to be, "to teach men, that considering the corruption, ignorance, and weakness of the human nature, on the one hand, and the infinite wisdom and immense greatness of God on the other, they should renounce

their own strength, their own righteousness, put their full trust in God, and submit themselves to him in all things with the deepest humility and reverence." This instruction is forcibly inculcated through the interlocutory parts of the whole book. The historical part exhibits "an high example of consummate and rewarded patience." "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord." The trial of his patience would not have been comparably so great, if he had not previously enjoyed an uncommon degree of prosperity. The firmness of our minds, especially our patience, is peculiarly tried by great and sudden changes, from a prosperous to an adverse condition. Before his misfortunes, Job had no rival in worldly greatness among all the people of the East. In wealth, power, and honour, he was a prince eminent and distinguished above his contemporaries. And what was yet more remarkable, his piety and goodness equalled his temporal grandeur. He was as much above others in excellence of character, as in worldly circumstances. Amidst the corruptions, idolatries, and superstitions already spreading among mankind, he preserved the purity of that religion which had been handed down from the preceding patriarchs. Entertaining just and worthy conceptions of the one true and living God, he conscientiously worshipped him in spirit and in truth. "He feared God, and eschewed evil."

Blessed with a numerous offspring, it was also his care to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Nor did his anxiety for their spiritual welfare cease after they had arrived at mature age, and were settled in distinct families of their own. As they abounded in wealth through his indulgence, he feared that by luxury and sensuality their hearts might be alienated from God. It was therefore his stated custom, after every repetition of their family feasts, to send them a message on religion ; requiring their sanctification by those ritual ceremonies then in use, and the preparing of themselves to join with him in the solemnities of God's worship ; in which he offered " burnt-offerings according to the number of them all. Thus did Job continually." We can hardly imagine a stronger proof of the habitual tenderness of his conscience, and of his dread of sin, either in himself or in any of his family. With what scrupulous circumspection did he guard against whatever he apprehended might be offensive in the sight of Heaven !

With this his eminent and exemplary piety, he joined all the social virtues which could adorn his station and circumstances. Opulent and powerful as he was, he knew how " to use this world without abusing it." In his hands, power and wealth were used for the protection of the oppressed, and as the resource of the poor. As a magistrate, he

was a terror to evildoers, and the scourge of injustice ; and being rich, he abounded in good works, and in all the expressions of a diffusive benevolence. In defending himself against the suspicions of his friends, he was able to say, “ I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish, came upon me ; and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me ; my judgment was a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and the cause which I knew not, I searched out. I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth. The stranger did not lodge in the street. I opened my doors to the traveller. My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch.” By the uniform practice of these virtues, he had obtained an established character for eminent worth and goodness. So highly was he esteemed and honoured by the good, and so revered and dreaded by the wicked, that we can hardly conceive of a human character more dignified and respectable. “ When I went out to the gate through the city, the young men saw me, and hid themselves ; the aged arose and stood up ; the princes refrained talking ; the nobles held their peace. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me ; and when the eye

saw me, it gave witness to me. Unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence at my counsel. After my words they spake not again; and my speech dropped upon them. They waited for me as for the rain. I chose out their way, and sat chief, dwelling as a king in the army." All these tokens of respect, so natural and so manly, are suitable to that simplicity of manners which prevailed in the patriarchal age.

If virtue and goodness, in such a world as this, could shield a man from calamity, Job had surely some reason for the hope which he entertained concerning himself, when he said, "I shall multiply my days as the sand, and in the end die peaceably in my nest." He did not, however, rest secure and at ease in this hope. He had too just a sense of the vanity of the world, and of the vicissitudes of all earthly things, to promise himself an uninterrupted course of prosperity. In the midst of all his enjoyments, his boding mind seems occasionally to have presaged the dreadful reverse to which he was destined. After this reverse had actually befallen him, he said, "The thing which I greatly feared, is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of, is come unto me. I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came." This rendered the dispensation the more mysterious and perplexing to his thoughts.

An approving conscience in the review of his past life, would not suffer him to consider his afflictions as sent to correct that secure and arrogant temper, which is too often occasioned by worldly success and prosperity. As he knew that he had never indulged to that presumption which provokes correction, he was the more at a loss to account for his being visited in a manner so remarkably severe, and different from what had befallen any other mortal. He had indeed been highly blessed and prospered; yet he had received these blessings with thankfulness, enjoyed them with temperance, and used them in a manner which he judged to be most honorary to the supreme Donor. Why then should he have been, in so sudden and awful a manner, stripped of the whole, and overwhelmed with complicated misery? The unsearchable design of the dispensation, the mysterious darkness in which it was involved, was one of its most trying and aggravating circumstances. After exerting his own reason in vain to account for it, he desired to be enlightened from above; and was constrained earnestly to pray, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me."

The sacred historian represents his sufferings as proceeding, through the divine permission, from the immediate agency and malice of Satan. The manner of this evil spirit's obtaining license from God to afflict his servant Job, is set forth in an

allegory not unlike to the vision of Micaiah, concerning the fate of Ahab. "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them." By the "sons of God," it is most natural to understand the angels. The existence of such beings, both good and bad, seems to have been among the first things made known to mankind by revelation. They are represented as employed by God in the administration of his providence,—evil angels acting by his permission, and good ones by his authority and commission. And as kings are accustomed to decide their most important affairs in a solemn council or assembly; so God, after the manner of men, and in accommodation to our way of conceiving, is represented as passing the decrees of his providence, in an assembly of his angelic ministers. As the imagery of this statement refers to the transactions of the invisible world, giving us but a transient glimpse of the unsearchable counsels of the Almighty, it is not my present purpose to attempt an explanation of its particulars. Perhaps it is not of much importance to inquire, whether it is to be understood in a sense literal or figurative.

The great enemy of man being let loose upon the possessions and family of Job, chose the opportunity to afflict him when the shock of his calamities might prove the most dreadful. On a day of

festivity, when his children were assembled at the house of their eldest brother, a messenger arrives with the evil tidings of the mischief done him by the Sabeans, in the loss of all his cattle and servants in the field. This story is scarcely finished, when another brings the unheard of account of his seven thousand sheep, together with their keepers, being consumed by lightning. A third hurries in with the news of the Chaldean invasion, and of the spoil which they had made of his camels and servants. And while he was still making his report, to complete the catalogue of Job's misfortunes, a fourth brings him the heart-rending tidings of the instantaneous death of all his children, by a hurricane from the wilderness. All these calamities happening together, in a manner so singular and wholly beside the common course of providence, were well worthy of the prince of the power of the air, and suitable to that malevolence of disposition attributed to him in Scripture.

Thus commenced the first scene of Job's trial. And how did he acquit himself? Let us imagine ourselves in his situation, and ask our own hearts how we could sustain such a weight of misery, so instantaneously heaped upon us? Endued with the sensibilities of human nature, Job felt all the pangs of his afflictions, and used those expressions of grief which were customary in that age. "He rent his mantle, shaved his head, and fell down

upon the ground." But in all this, like a wise and good man, he prostrated himself before God, under a humble sense of his own unworthiness, and with adoring apprehensions of the divine dominion and sovereignty. "He fell upon the ground and worshipped," saying, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this," the history adds, "Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." Happy man, who could still think worthily of God, and retain his reverence for him and confidence in him, under the sharpest scourges of his rod!

But another scene of misery soon opens upon him, and opens as the first did, with the same machinery of angels, good and bad, appearing before God as the ministers of his providential administration of the government of the world. Hitherto Satan had not been permitted to touch Job's person. At the next assembly of the sons of God, he obtained leave to touch his bone and his flesh, and torment him to the utmost, short of his life. Immediately Job was covered from head to foot with grievous sores and boils, rendering his whole person loathsome, and as full of pain and anguish as infernal malice could inflict. Reduced to this deplorable condition, he became an object of disgust to all about him. That complaint, "My breath is strange to my wife," seems to imply that

that even *she* proved unkind, and endeavoured to avoid him. Nay, if our translation be correct, she seems to have been gained over by Satan to insult and reproach him with his preposterous piety. “Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God and die.” While Job was making his submission to God, and pouring out his supplications before him; his wife, agitated with feelings very different, wild and distracted by the dreadful change of their condition, in a transport of passion, which was but the more increased by witnessing his patience and resignation, broke out upon him—“Dost thou still continue thy devotions, blessing God while he is destroying thee—calling upon him and adoring his goodness, after he has ruined thy family and estate, and, notwithstanding all thy submissions, is now slaughtering thy body?” In no instance, perhaps, does the patience of this good man appear to more advantage than in the mild, yet pious answer, which he returned on this occasion: “Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh—not like thyself. What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? Since both proceed from the same wise and righteous Disposer, should we not submit to his will?” Hitherto Job preserved the utmost propriety of behaviour; not a word had escaped him, savouring of impatience or of a murmuring disposition. The history is express, that as yet he had not “sinned with his lips.”

But the steadiness and composure of his mind were to receive further, if not severer trials still, from the behaviour of his friends, and from the construction put by the world upon his extraordinary sufferings. To the feelings of a good man, the inflictions of providence are not comparably so irritating, as the evil surmises and slanderous imputations of his friends and neighbours around him,—especially when they suspect him of the blackest crimes, and consider his sufferings as so many proofs of his guilt.

The unheard of calamities of Job had rendered him a spectacle of sorrow and wretchedness to all beholders. The whole country around, so far as the fame of his grandeur and goodness had extended, was now full of his story and of astonishment. Religious people, in that age, knew not how to construe such signal calamities, but as the judgments of the Almighty upon an hypocrite, who, under the cloak of religion, had concealed a most odious character. In all probability, the openly profane and irreligious triumphed in his sufferings, “as a justification of their own bad principles and practices, and as a demonstration of the insignificance of the strictest regards to God and his worship.” His near kindred and friends would no longer acknowledge any relation to so abandoned a creature, but turned from him with disgust and horror. The surviving members of his family

joined with his wife in treating him with unkindness and neglect. The basest of men broke in upon him like so many fiends, sporting themselves with his sufferings, heaping insults and indignities upon him, and not sparing even to "spit in his face."

In how moving and pathetic a manner does he complain of these things! "They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight. I called my servant, and he gave me no answer. Young children despised me; I arose and they spake against me. All my inward friends abhorred me; and they whom I loved, are turned against me. God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked. They have gaped upon me with their mouth, they have smitten me upon the cheek reproachfully. Children of base men have me in derision. I am their song, yea, I am their by-word. They came upon me as the wide breaking in of waters—they rolled themselves upon me. They abhor me and spare not to spit in my face." Under such a load of grief, such a complication of misery, Job must have been above the feelings of human nature, if he had not occasionally betrayed some infirmity.

Among his friends dwelling in the adjacent country, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, were men of similar rank, as well as piety and good sense,

with himself. He had been long happy in a social intercourse and intimacy with these respectable neighbours. On hearing the report of what had befallen him, and of the dishonour thereby occasioned to religion, they agreed to make him a visit. Though they had the same ill opinion of him, and believed with the rest of the world that his extraordinary sufferings were divine inflictions for some great and heinous wickedness; yet they hoped that by impressing his conscience with a sense of guilt, they might be able to bring him to repentance, and a consequent interest in the divine favour, the only source of all true consolation. But on their arriving at his melancholy habitation, they beheld their late flourishing, honourable, and highly esteemed friend, an object so forsaken and forlorn, sitting in ashes, and reduced to such loathsome wretchedness, that they were themselves overwhelmed with astonishment and grief. "They lifted up their voice and wept, rent each one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads." The history adds, "So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him; for they saw that his grief was very great."

"Though this description have the same poetical aspect with some other circumstances in the story, yet it might be literally true and agreeable to the manners of those ancient times. A long

silence is a very natural effect of an extraordinary grief, which overwhelms the mind, and creates a sort of stupor and astonishment. ‘Sitting on the ground,’ is an oriental phrase, to express their passing the time in the deepest mourning.” As the friends of Job saw his grief to be too great to admit of those severe things which they had meditated for him, and as their bad opinion of him would not suffer them to address consolatory discourses to him,—they chose at first to remain silent. But the sight of his old acquaintance and their unfavourable manner of condolence, seem to have swollen the grief of his mind to such an height, that at length it burst forth in that torrent of bitter reflections, which are recorded in the third chapter.

When the long silence had been thus broken by himself, his friends embraced the opportunity of laying open to him their sense of his case. They began indeed with an air of tenderness, but soon intimated their apprehensions that he had been very defective in the character to which he had pretended; and, in short, that his great sufferings were evident indications of great sins, and of the wrath of God against him as an hypocritical and wicked person. This charge Job firmly and resolutely repels, answering all their arguments and maintaining his integrity and uprightness, till they are at length silenced, though perhaps not convinced. They

all speak like men of sense and piety, but, as they waxed warm in the debate, their expressions on both sides are perhaps too strong and exaggerated. As Job continued speaking long after his friends had ceased to answer, Elihu, a young man of an excellent understanding, a by-stander and witness of the whole controversy, at length comes forward as moderator, and freely censures both parties, judiciously pointing out what had been faulty in the arguments, both of Job and of his friends.

Finally, God himself answers Job out of the whirlwind. Nothing can be conceived more awful than this appearance of Jehovah; nothing more sublime than the manner in which the speech is introduced. Thunders, lightnings, and a whirlwind announce his approach! All creation trembles at his presence! At the blaze of his all-piercing eye, every disguise falls off. The stateliness of human pride, the vanity of human knowledge, sink into their original nothing. The man of understanding, the man of age and experience; he who desired nothing more than to argue the point with God; he that would maintain his ways to his face,—confounded at his presence, and ready to drop into dissolution, with the deepest humiliation and reverence, exclaims, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” With these words the poem ends. The remainder of the book is mere history.

After the speech of the Almighty had brought Job to this humble and penitent temper, it pleased God to restore him to health and prosperity. His three friends are directed to seek his intercession, as not having spoken so well of God as the person whom they had accused. All his former possessions were doubled, and his life prolonged to probably double the number of years that he had lived before his affliction. This temporal good was granted as an earnest of a still greater and higher felicity in store for him hereafter. Such was "the end of the Lord," thus merciful and gracious in his dealings with this his faithful servant. His afflictions were permitted that he might exhibit to all the succeeding generations of mankind a noble and shining example of suffering virtue.

He is called "a perfect and upright man;" but by these expressions we are only to understand that he was a man of sincere and eminent goodness. A character strictly perfect, has never appeared but once on the real stage of the world. In Job, as well as in other good men, there was a mixture of human infirmity. His bitter complaints, execrations on his birthday, weariness of life, longing for death, eagerness to be brought upon his trial, and his expostulations with his Judge, were all below the serene dignity and perfect submission with which the man Christ Jesus endured far greater sufferings. They were shades and blem-

ishes in this otherwise excellent character, and argued some degree of impatience even in this heroic pattern of patience. It should be remembered, however, that they were wrung from him by the astonishing nature and uncommon severity of his sufferings, accompanied with the rash censures and torturing suspicions of his friends. The ready forgiveness and favour with which his humble acknowledgment was accepted, and the ample reward which compensated his sufferings, may teach us the tender compassions of God towards the infirmities and weaknesses of our nature, and how ready he is to overlook our slighter failings, where there is a fixed principle of piety, and an heart steadily bent upon the practice of virtue amidst all trials and temptations.

In this world we are all upon trial. We are placed here in the midst of temptations, difficulties, and troubles, that by repeated acts of wisdom and virtue, in opposition to all the allurements to folly and vice, we might acquire those habits of self-command, submission to God, and acquiescence in his will, which may fit us for a state of higher felicity in a better world. The example of Job and of other good men whose lives are recorded in Scripture, is set before us to encourage and animate our endeavours to tread in their steps. By what happened to them, we are warned of the temptations and dangers to which we ourselves are

exposed ; and in their victory and triumph over them, we see to what noble attainments our nature is capable of rising, when duly cultivated and improved. God grant that we may all become followers of those “ who through faith and patience are already inheriting the promises !”

SERMON XVIII.*

PREACHING OF PAUL.

ACTS xxiv. 25.

As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.

As the ministers of Christ, in fulfilling the duties of their holy profession, must wish to regard St. Paul as a model, copying after his manner of preaching, his judgment in accommodating his discourses to the circumstances and characters of his hearers, and his earnestness and zeal in speaking to their hearts and consciences; the words now read may lead us to contemplate him in each of these respects. Of his method of preaching we are informed by the assertion, that *he reasoned*.

The great pre-eminence of human beings above the other species of creatures belonging to this lower creation, results from their powers of reason. By this faculty they are enabled to reflect upon

* This discourse was delivered at an ordination. The portion of it more immediately adapted to the occasion, being alone omitted.

their own perceptions—on the treasures of knowledge already accumulated in their minds; to discern the distinction between opposite moral qualities, good and evil, truth and falsehood; to compare ideas or different propositions, to mark their agreement or repugnance, and to educe one truth from another, in a continued series, by bringing into view their reciprocal relations. Reasoning consists in such a use of our powers of thought and intellect. In this way human knowledge in general is both acquired and communicated, and the understandings of men improved and cultivated.

As all other knowledge, so that of religion, of its principles and duties, must be obtained by thus reasoning upon them. The religion of Christ being a reasonable service, it invites us to examine both its doctrines, and its credentials, and requires to be received upon no other ground, but that of a rational conviction of its truth. As it is contained in certain writings which claim the authority of divine inspiration, it is the office of reason to examine and judge of the evidence upon which this claim is founded. Besides the christian scriptures, there are in the world divers other writings most opposite to them in their doctrines and precepts, which yet pretend to the same authority. Reason in its most improved state and most vigorous exercise, is necessary to enable us to judge correctly of the respective claims of those various systems, each of

which offers itself to us as a revelation from God. Through the weakness of their reason, or through their neglect to exercise it upon the things of religion, the great mass of mankind from age to age have become the dupes of numberless impostors ; have fallen under strong and dangerous delusions, or given themselves up to the most absurd superstitions. To think and examine, each one for himself, being an exertion too great for their indolence, they have preferred the taking of their religion on trust, by an implicit faith. But they are, in every instance, false religions, the inventions of men, the dreams of enthusiasts, or the fabrications of statesmen for political purposes, which require to be so received. It was the design of the great Author of our being in conferring upon us the gift of reason, that we should improve it in searching after the knowledge of him, of our duty to him, and to one another. To assist our reason in this search, revelation has been added. But this revelation was at first accompanied and is still attended with such proofs of its being derived from God, that, when impartially examined, unbiassed reason cannot fail of admitting its truth. With these proofs, each believer in revealed religion ought to be so acquainted, as to be able, whenever challenged, to render a reason for his faith, or for the hope which is in him.

Nor is it only in judging of the evidence upon which we receive the Christian Scriptures as the word of God, that the exercise of reason is necessary. In the right understanding of these Scriptures, in searching out their true meaning, the doctrines which they teach and the duties which they enjoin, the closest study, the most diligent and earnest labours of reason are requisite. As the original Scriptures are contained in languages long since dead and out of use, whose style was that of the oriental nations, highly figurative, comprising many images scarcely intelligible in the western world, especially in modern times, and abounding with allusions to manners, circumstances, and events which took place many ages ago, it is hardly possible rightly and accurately to understand them without the closest attention and the greatest care in comparing scripture with scripture, aided by deep research into antiquity and a competent knowledge of ancient history. If it cannot be expected of private christians that they should apply to the study of them, aided by all these advantages, yet it would be inexcusable in any professed expounder of them, not to avail himself of every mean within his reach for ascertaining their true sense ; nor would it be honorary to any christian society to set up such a character for their public teacher.

We see the christian world divided into numberless sects and parties, holding tenets opposite to

each other, and practising rites and ceremonies, in some instances, resembling those of ancient paganism. Among those who are called Christians, damnable heresies have crept in, doctrines of demons have been professed, and superstitions practised, which are a reproach to reason, and a disgrace to humanity. From the Scriptures, however, all these sects and parties profess to derive their respective creeds and modes of worship. Could there have been these divisions among Christians, had the Scriptures been rightly understood, or had reason been properly employed in the study of them? Are they not the result of inattention, of a criminal want of heed to that light which is come into the world? While the greatest proportion of the men called learned have been too indolent, or too much engaged in other studies, to exercise their reason about their spiritual concerns; the holy Scriptures, the depositories of all religious truth, have been left, not unfrequently, to the management of ignorance, prejudice, passion, and interest. By these wild expounders they have been perverted to all manner of purposes. No doctrine is so absurd, and scarcely any practice so abominable as not to have been ostensibly supported by the wresting of some texts or passages in the Bible. Not by men of corrupt minds only, has this sacred book been thus abused. Multitudes have undesignedly mistaken its meaning. The best are liable to err. Of all

its translators and expositors from the apostolic age down to the present, there have been none whose weaknesses or prejudices have not betrayed them into some mistakes.

Should not these observations convince us how important it is that we endeavour to see with our own eyes, to search and study the sacred writings each one for himself? The unlearned indeed must, of course, depend on the fidelity of translations; but would it not be disgraceful to the professed teacher thus to take upon trust what he delivers to others for inspired truth? Should his deficiency be unknown and unsuspected abroad, yet could he feel satisfied with himself as a "workman who needeth not to be ashamed?" The gift of tongues was among the qualifications with which the first teachers of christianity were furnished. What they obtained by miracle, their successors are expected to obtain by diligence and application. "Though my knowledge of the Hebrew tongue be small," says the celebrated Luther, "I would not exchange it for the treasures of the world." As a reason, he adds, "They who read only versions of the Hebrew scriptures, see with the eyes of others; they stand with the people in the courts, and view the sacred rites at a distance; but whoever is acquainted with the sacred text itself, is admitted with the priests into the sanctuary, and is himself a witness and a judge of all that is transacted in the recesses of the temple."

If the christian teacher ought not implicitly to confide in translations, should he not be still more cautious with respect to commentaries and expositions? Certain it is that all these are more or less tinged with the peculiarities of their respective authors.* Prepossessions, in some measure, take hold on every mind. No uninspired men, however pious, or however learned, are to be regarded as infallible. "By the law and the testimony," our own reason must try their interpretations, admitting or rejecting them through that criterion. In this way only should they be used; and in this way indeed the more rational and judicious of them may assist our inquiries.

After reason has been thus exercised in accumulating the treasures of religious knowledge, it may be expected to preside and direct in the dispensing of those treasures. The habit of correct reasoning having been formed by the learner, on his becoming a teacher, it will naturally lead him so to methodize and arrange his instructions, that one important truth after another in a continued,

* "What are these huge volumes which fill up one side of the room," said a visitor to the keeper of a public library. "These are the interpreters of the scriptures," was the answer. "There is a prodigious number of them; the Scriptures must have been very dark formerly and be very clear at present. Are there any remaining doubts, any points still contested?" "Are there? do you ask? almost as many as there are lines." "You astonish me! what then have all these authors been doing?" "Searching the Scriptures to find, not what ought to be believed, but what themselves already believed." If this be high colouring, it is not wholly unfounded.

connected series will pertinently be brought forward, unfolded and set in a clear light before the understanding of the hearer, strengthening his judgment and assisting his memory, while it convinces his conscience and operates on his will and affections.

Such was the manner of St. Paul's preaching. When it is said of him that *he reasoned*, we think of the good sense displayed in the order and connexion of his sentiments, as well as in their importance and in the proofs advanced for their support. His discourses were not loose harangues, made up of rambling, disjointed observations. They consisted not of bold assertions abruptly thrown out, unsustained by any show of argument, though incessantly repeated in tones of vociferation, attended with wild airs and gestures. These methods of dispensing pretended instruction are indeed but too common. They are in constant use with those impostors and enthusiasts who impiously affect to be thought apostles, as having partaken in gifts supernatural. Are they not such characters, of whom we read, that "they creep into houses, leading away silly women laden with iniquities?" It may seem strange that, in this enlightened age, such pretended teachers should attract notice. It is astonishing that they should draw crowds after them. Good sense, as well as true religion, cannot but disclaim them. Revelation is indeed the light given to direct us, but reason is the intellectual eye

by which alone this light can be either seen or used to any valuable purpose. Is it not wonderful that, after they have received the gift of reason and by every day's experience reaped its advantages in all their common affairs, men should lay it aside in their most difficult and weighty concerns, where their eternal interests are involved? Of what avail can any religious faith or practice be, any farther than it is reasonable? In what can its piety or morality consist? If we would be rationally religious, must we not desire and seek such instruction only as is adapted to improve and edify rational beings?

It was by such instruction that the first propagators of Christianity succeeded in spreading the knowledge of this religion in the world. Their preaching was always rational. That of St. Paul seems to have been generally in the argumentative strain. In discoursing to the Gentiles, he began with reasoning on the principles of natural religion, in connexion with which he proceeded to introduce and establish some or other of the doctrines of revelation. When addressing the Jews, he drew his arguments in favour of the Gospel, from those scriptures which were by the Jews already received and acknowledged. Thus in a synagogue at Thessalonica, for three successive sabbaths, "he reasoned with the Jews out of the Scriptures;" opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suf-

ferred, and risen again from the dead ; and that this Jesus whom he preached, was Christ." At Corinth too, we read, that he "reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and Greeks." Also at Ephesus, he "entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews." And in the text, when preaching before Felix and Drusilla, "he reasoned."

On this last occasion he laboured under the signal disadvantage of being a prisoner, speaking before those who had his liberty and even his life in their power, and whose characters could promise little honour to any religion. Felix, as a magistrate, was notorious for the abuse of his power in acts of injustice and oppression. His wife Drusilla was not less notorious for lewdness. Enslaved however as these great personages were to avarice and lust, that curiosity or thirst after knowledge which is natural to the human mind, prompted them to give Paul a hearing on the subject of the christian faith, the new religion then spreading in the world. Glad of every opportunity for preaching Christ, after evidencing Jesus to be the Christ, the Apostle dwelt upon such parts of his religion as were the best adapted to the known character of his hearers, as tending to awaken in them a sense of their guilt and danger, and thus to bring them to repentance, and to faith in the Saviour. Righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, are among

the fundamental articles of the christian faith, having been abundantly taught by Christ himself during his ministry on earth. In their full extent, they comprehend the substance of his religion. The great call of the Gospel to us is—that we consider our ways—break off our sins by repentance—for the future, do justly, in rendering to God the things which are his, to our fellow-men the things which are theirs—and become temperate in all things by self-government. To do these things from evangelical motives, in hope of pardon for the past through the mediation of Christ, and with a view to that recompense of reward which he has promised at the last day, comprises the whole duty of a Christian. It was therefore the “faith of Christ,” which Paul preached, while “he reasoned on righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” After elucidating these subjects he undoubtedly enforced them by the dictates of reason, as well as by the precepts of revelation.

Under the head of justice, we may suppose him to have enlarged upon whatever is implied in “doing as we would be done by;” sanctioning that maxim by arguments derived from the mutual relation in which men stand to one another, and their equal relation to one common Father or Creator; of whose family they all are, and among whom he requires order, equity, truth, and charity. If a good human parent enjoin these things

upon his children, we must believe them to be the will of our common Father in heaven, and that he will be displeased with all those actions which proceed from opposite dispositions in us—with all injustice, oppression, and cruelty. When these crimes have been committed under the forms of law, when a ruler has so abused his power as to render it the source of misery to those for whose happiness only it ought to be exerted, his conscience must be loaded with the deepest guilt, his own heart must reproach him. Felix felt its reproaches while he heard Paul “reasoning” on the various branches of righteousness.

Next to these virtues the Apostle brought into view those pertaining to self-government, as they are implied in “temperance.” This has respect both to the body and the mind, and requires all the propensities of our nature to be under the control of virtue. “To be temperate in all things,” supposes due restrictions to be imposed on the passions as well as on the appetites. In discoursing on this topic, we may suppose that the Apostle, with great clearness and energy, set forth the deformity and criminality of the vices opposite to temperance.

Having by these strictures laid matter of conviction before the consciences of his hearers, in the conclusion, he drew their attention to the scenes of a future “judgment,” when all men shall give an

account to God of the deeds done in the body. Reason leads us to expect that, under a righteous government, every man shall sooner or later receive according to his works. It being manifest that this does not take place in the present world, all our ideas of the moral perfections of God lead us to infer that there must be a future state. But in discoursing on a judgment to come, St. Paul, as an apostle of Christ and a publisher of his religion, taught its certainty and the awful circumstances of its proofs as set forth in the gospel revelation. He assured his auditors that, as God had sent his Son by his death to make propitiation for the sins of the world, so he had constituted him its future judge ; whereof he had given ample evidence by raising him from the dead and exalting him at his own right hand in the heavens. If in times past he had seemed to wink at the ignorance, the follies, and vices of mankind ; yet now, by the Gospel, he called all men every where to repent and reform, in hope, on the one part, of his forgiveness through the atoning blood of his Son ; and on the other, through fear of that dreadful condemnation which would await every one who should persist in neglecting so great salvation. These things were depicted in such glowing colours, and with such force of argument, that they took hold on the conscience of Felix. He “ trembled.”

This effect, considering upon whom it was produced, is a clear proof of the energy, the strength of reason, which animated the whole tenor of St. Paul's well methodized discourse. A man of so high a rank as Felix, after such an education as he must have received, and after having been accustomed to the eloquence of those finished orators who, in that age, flourished at Rome—would have been wholly unimpressed by mere declamation, however vehement, and though on a subject ever so interesting. But the Apostle's reasoning on "righteousness and temperance," had suggested to the conscience of Felix the manifold instances in which he had heinously violated those moral obligations; and with these convictions rising in his mind, the discourse carried him before the awful tribunal of that Judge, with whom there is no respect of persons, and who will by no means clear the guilty. The certainty of such an arraignment was evinced by a train of arguments which Felix knew not how to confute or evade. In the meanwhile, his awakened conscience gathered strength; his fears were alarmed, and rose to such an height that he was no longer master of himself. The joints of his loins were loosed, and his whole frame trembled.

Such an impression seems to be all that can be expected from preaching. To render the impression lasting and effectual to repentance, surpasses

the power of human eloquence, even when it flows from inspired lips, from a Paul or Apollos. No planting, sowing, or watering, is of itself effectual. It is however in the use of these appointed means, that it pleases God to give the increase ; and the more ably and faithfully they are used, the more rationally may we hope for the divine blessing. If men be said to be saved “through the foolishness of preaching,” the thing meant, certainly is not *foolish* preaching. When faith is said to come by *hearing*, we are to understand such *hearing* as is impressive. To make the impression therefore, should be the aim of every sermon—the object of the preacher in all his studies and preparations for the pulpit. This will be his aim, provided his heart be in his work, and he prosecute it from motives such as influenced St. Paul. He was moved and quickened by a sense of his own eternal interest. He believed his own salvation to depend on the fidelity of his exertions to save others ; and that any negligence towards them, would prove dangerous to himself. “Necessity is laid upon me,” he exclaims, “yea, wo is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel.”

At the same time, he regarded the salvation of his fellow-men as an object of equal value with his own. And knowing them to have been ransomed at the same price, by the same stupendous love of the Saviour,—he partook, in a degree, of this love,

having in himself the same mind which was in Christ; and from this motive was urged on to all his unwearied exertions for the common salvation. He attributes his extraordinary labours in the Gospel to the "love of Christ constraining him." For, says he, "We thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead;" and thence he infers that their recovery was possible in no other way than by the death of him who has brought life and immortality to light.

The christian teacher who enters into these views, entertained by the Apostle, of the nature of the gospel salvation, of the price at which it was purchased, and of its infinite importance to the souls of men; can be in no want of motives sufficiently powerful to excite his utmost diligence and fidelity. All his talents will of course be exercised and occupied in persuading men to accept the gospel terms.

In these attempts, it will be his first care to gain and secure their attention. Much will depend upon his skill in the arts of persuasion, on his taste and judgment in adapting his mode of reasoning and his manner of address, to the circumstances and character of his audience, with reference to their peculiar habits of thought, their preconceived opinions and biasses of mind. In accommodating himself to these their known peculiarities, he cannot have a better guide than the example of St. Paul.

In points not essential, the Apostle becomes all things to all men, that, by all means, he may save some. With those under the law who believe themselves still bound by its ceremonial institutions, he observes those institutions after he knows them to have been abolished ; while with those who have attained to the same knowledge with himself, he uses his christian liberty. To the weak, he becomes as weak, and will eat no meat while the world standeth, rather than occasion the weakest brother to offend. To every class of converts through each grade of religious improvement, he adapts his instructions as well as his behaviour, furnishing milk for babes and strong meat to those of mature growth ; comforting the feeble-minded, while he warns the unruly ; being “gentle among them, even as a nurse cherisheth her children.” With respect to the unconverted world, he acknowledges himself a debtor to all descriptions of men, “both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, to the wise and the unwise,” by every possible method to bring them to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. In addressing these greatly diversified characters, with admirable discernment he varies his manner and the topics of his discourse in ways best suited to their respective capacities, weaknesses, prejudices, errors, and vices. To the heathen, worshipping dumb idols, he sets forth the absurdity of idolatry. To the Jews, look-

ing through Moses and the prophets for their promised Messiah, he solemnly testifies that Jesus is the Messiah whom they are expecting. To the awakened jailor inquiring, "What shall I do to be saved?" he immediately answers, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ;" while with the hardened, unprincipled Felix, in order to excite in him the concern already felt by the jailor, he reasons of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come.

Thus plainly does he deal with the man under whose power he is fallen. Amidst bonds and imprisonment, while loaded with fetters of iron, un-awed, and fearless of those who can kill the body only, he boldly preaches justice to an unjust judge, continence to his lewd and adulterous wife, and a future judgment to them both.

The event of Paul's reasoning with Felix, though the impression at the time was equal to any thing to be expected from preaching, shows that sinful men may efface the deepest impressions, stifle and resist the strongest convictions, and, in this way, disappoint the most promising appearances, rendering abortive all human means and endeavours for their salvation. "Felix trembled!" How strong must have been his emotions! How exquisite his feelings! A degree of faith had entered his mind, and given rise to those feelings and emotions. He was at the moment persuaded, or strongly apprehensive, that the things taught by

the Apostle were true. They so far gained the assent of his understanding and conscience, as to overwhelm him with terror. But still his heart was so enslaved to his lusts, so shackled with the bands of wickedness, that he could not resolve to shake them off. He chose rather to shake off his fears, by turning his attention from the cause of them. He dismissed the preacher, though with an intimation, perhaps at the time sincere, that at some future season which, he supposes, will be more convenient, he would hear further. That season seems never to have occurred. With the present delay, all the hopes and prospects of the Gospel which had begun to unfold, were at once and finally closed. Thus the accepted time and the day of salvation were lost. This melancholy result is recorded on purpose that it might serve, through all succeeding ages, as a solemn warning against a double-minded conduct in religion, against all wavering and trifling in our eternal concerns, against disregarding the better thoughts and sentiments of our hearts, or shutting our eyes against the light that has begun to dawn on our understandings; against delaying to any future season, that sincere and thorough reformation which, whenever effected, must commence in an awakened sense of our guilt and danger. May divine grace render the warning effectual to all and every one in this assembly!

SERMON XIX.

MERCY BEFORE SACRIFICE.

MATTHEW xii. 7.

But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

It appears from the preceding context, that as our Saviour was passing a cornfield upon the sabbath, his disciples plucked some ears to satisfy their hunger. The captious Pharisees instantly accused them of violating the sanctity of the day. Together with several other arguments urged in their vindication, Jesus reminded their accusers, that they would not have been so hasty in thus condemning the innocent, if they had rightly understood the divine declaration by the Prophet—
“I will have mercy and not sacrifice.”

In these words, two sorts of duties are mentioned; *mercy*, a duty of a moral nature towards men; and *sacrifice*, a ritual or ceremonial duty

towards God. These are compared, and the preference given to mercy. Both indeed were enjoined by the same divine authority. In the ancient forms of religion, sacrifices possessed a principal place; but no external rites can, in their nature, be equally important with the inward exercises of the heart; nor so essential to true religion, as the duties of self-preservation, or as those of charity and beneficence to mankind. The latter being in themselves the weightier things of the law, must, in case of competition, take place of the former. We are to forego the stated worship of God, and the sanctification of the Sabbath, rather than neglect works of necessity and mercy. True religion essentially consists in our sincere and supreme regard for God. That our hearts be right with him, comprehends the sum of our duty. Our Saviour tells us that the first and great commandment is, "to love the Lord our God with all our heart." But as the hearts and dispositions of men are expressed and manifested by their actions, our regard for God must appear in the obedience of our lives. Next in importance to the love of God, is that other commandment, "to love our neighbour as ourselves." Obedience to this is, in itself, more important and more acceptable to God, than the show of respect to him in the forms of religious worship. Both indeed are required, as the proper modes of manifesting our love to God; and though

our obedience ought, and, when it is sincere, will be, in some good measure, universal; yet some duties are more weighty than others, and partake more of the nature of true religion. That this pre-eminence belongs to the social virtues above ritual institutions, or the outward forms of worship, will appear if we consider,

First, That moral duties are more insisted upon in Scripture, than ritual observances, or the forms of worship. The inspired writers more frequently mention, and lay greater stress upon the practice of justice, truth, and mercy, than they do on fasting, praying, sacrificing, or any other religious form. When Isaiah describes the character of the man, who shall not only escape the devouring fire, but “whose dwelling shall be on high, whose place of defence shall be the munition of rocks;” he exhibits him as “walking righteously, speaking uprightly, despising the gain of oppression, shaking his hands from the holding of bribes, stopping his ears from the hearing of blood, and shutting his eyes from seeing evil.” When Daniel urges Nebuchadnezzar to a reformation, as the only mean to ward off or delay the calamity which was impending over him; his words are, “Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.”

A similar strain is adopted by all the prophets in their calls and exhortations to amendment. They particularize and dwell upon the moral duties, the various branches of social virtue. Nor are the writers of the New Testament less urgent upon these topics. In the answers given by John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, to the various classes of people who received his baptism and sought his advice, he especially cautioned them against the immoralities to which their respective situations and callings exposed them. To the common people saying, What shall we do? "he answered, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also the publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? He said unto them, Exact no more than what is appointed you. The soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? He said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages." In each of these replies, moral duties only, justice, truth, and mercy, are named. To these our Saviour himself, throughout his preaching, exhorted men as of next importance to the love of God and the internal exercises of piety towards him. His sermon upon the mount principally consists in particularizing, explaining, and enforcing these duties. How much they are en-

larged upon in the Apostolic epistles, must be known to every reader. Even that to the Romans, in which the doctrines of grace are so amply discussed, concludes with several whole chapters on the social virtues. It may be observed,

Secondly, That when the Scriptures compare these virtues with the externals of God's worship, they represent them as more acceptable in his sight. By quoting Hosea in the text, our Saviour gives his sanction to the opinion of the prophet, that *mercy* is above *sacrifice*. Similar instances of this preference occur throughout the sacred writings. From the ninth to the eighteenth verse of the first chapter of Isaiah, the prophet explicitly states these two kinds of duties. He first admits that the Jews, degenerate and corrupt as they were, still preserved with great exactness the forms of religious worship, abounded in sacrifices and oblations, observed the sabbaths, new moons, and appointed festivals, and attended the solemn meetings, habitually appearing before God, treading his courts, spreading forth their hands, and making many prayers. All these were instituted duties, yet, as performed by a hypocritical people, the prophet declares that God had no pleasure in them; nay, that he was weary to bear them. He then goes on to particularize those moral, social duties which consist in "seeking judgment, relieving the oppressed, judging the fatherless, and pleading for

the widow," as things incomparably more acceptable in the sight of God.

A similar representation again occurs in the fifty-eighth chapter of this book. There the people are described as attempting to secure the divine favour by the outward marks of humiliation, by frequent fasting, hanging down their head like a bulrush, spreading sackcloth on their loins, and sitting in ashes. After speaking lightly of all these, as mere hypocritical performances, the prophet proceeds to mention the substantial works of righteousness as things which would not fail of the divine approbation,—that if they would “loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, break every yoke, let the oppressed go free, deal their bread to the hungry, bring the poor that were cast out to their house, and when they saw the naked, would clothe them;” if they would make conscience of these moral, social duties; their public affairs would speedily emerge from their present depression and gloom, and their “light would break forth as the morning.” In the sixth chapter of Micah, the people are introduced thus inquiring, “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my

transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" To these interrogatories, this answer is given, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God?" You will observe that justice, mercy, and humility are here mentioned, as comprising the sum of what God requires of man, and as things of which the practice is far more acceptable in his sight than thousands of rams or ten thousand rivers of oil.

In the seventh chapter of Zechariah, to the Jews, after their return from Babylon, inquiring of the prophets and priests, whether they should still continue the fasts and stated seasons of humiliation which had been observed during their captivity, this answer is returned; "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother. Oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor, and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in his heart." You will observe that in this answer all the directions relate to the social virtues. To these the same preference is given by Jeremiah, and indeed by all the prophets.

From the passages already quoted, it appears that God's ancient people, in times of great degeneracy, did often keep up the forms of religious

worship, while they were most grossly and criminally deficient in works of righteousness. They professed to seek God daily, pretended a delight in approaching him, in asking of him the ordinances of justice, in fasting, praying, sacrificing, and the other forms of worship; while at the same time, they were so deficient in the moral duties, that "judgment was driven away backward, justice stood afar off, truth fell in the streets, and equity could not enter." While they seemed to abound in religion, they were destitute of honesty. While they filled their mouths with professions of respect for God and his service, they filled their lives with falsehood and fraud, with avarice and extortion in their dealings with one another. "From the least of them even unto the greatest of them," says Jeremiah, "every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet, even unto the priest, every one dealeth falsely." Hence we perceive that forms of devotion and acts of worship, are not so repugnant to the lusts and passions of men, as are the moral duties. The Pharisees in our Saviour's time made long prayers, while they scrupled not to devour widows' houses. They conscientiously tithed mint, anise, and cummin, and yet felt no remorse in daily violating the obligations of judgment, mercy, and faith. But I observe,

Thirdly, That when the Scriptures exhort Christians to show their faith by their works, they

seem principally to refer to works of moral, social goodness, such as proceed from an honest and good heart ; from a meek, patient, forgiving, and charitable temper ; from a disposition universally kind and beneficent. The apostle James, who so largely insists upon our proving our faith by our works, seems to have special reference to works of social goodness, and of beneficence to our fellow-men. He declares that “ pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction ; and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world,—that the wisdom which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits.” When St. John mentions the keeping of God’s commandments as the best evidence of our saving knowledge of him, the command to which he particularly refers throughout his epistle, is that which requires us to “ love one another.” In his view, the love of the brethren is one of the surest proofs of our being possessed of the love of God. It may be observed,

Fourthly, That our Saviour has warned us, that at the last day we shall be judged much more by our works of morality to men, than by our acts of worship to God. The latter will be urged in vain by those who have neglected the former. When the assembled race of men shall stand before the final Judge, many will plead the soundness

of their faith, their zealous professions of devotion to him, their attendance upon his ordinances and instructions, that they have heard him teach in their synagogues and streets, that they have eaten and drunk in his presence, and have even prophesied in his name, to whom he will notwithstanding profess, "I never knew you." These externals of religion, my brethren, will not be the grounds on which our character and state on that day will be determined. No; the grand inquiries will then be—whether from respect to Christ and his commands, ye have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, relieved the distressed, visited the sick, the imprisoned, and afflicted, and, by a tender sympathy, soothed and assuaged the pains and sorrows of your brethren—whether in imitation of him who went about doing good, ye have abounded in works of beneficence to the souls and bodies of men. But sufficient has been said to show you the importance of the moral virtues, and their superior worth in God's account to ritual observances and the forms of worship.

If it be said that the object of worship is greater than the object of moral duties—that God is infinitely greater than the whole race of men, and that, of course, homage to him is a duty more incumbent than doing good to men; it must be remembered that love to God, or the devotion of the heart to him, has been already admitted as the first and great commandment, and that from this

principle our beneficence to men and the moral virtues are to proceed. We are far from exalting these above the principle which originates them. What we affirm is, that they are better proofs of that principle than forms of worship. The great thing which God requires, is obedience. "To obey is better than sacrifice." "Not every one who saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of God." His will is as truly obeyed in acts of righteousness, truth, and mercy to men, as in those of worship to himself. He is obeyed in both, but in the former he considers himself as most honoured. The question is not, who shall be served first, God or man ; but, which way of obedience is most acceptable to God. This is affirmed to be that of doing good to men, because,

First, Forms of worship are but instrumental duties, and, in themselves, of little use any farther than as they express or cherish the devotion of the heart ; while acts of righteousness and charity to men, have in themselves the very matter of moral right and fitness. When you perform works of righteousness, pay a just debt, give to the hireling his due, are punctual to your promise, or faithful to your trust,—in each of these instances, right takes place ; or if you relieve the distressed, show mercy to the poor, and sympathize with the afflicted,—these things are a doing good. They to whom

justice is rendered, are thereby benefited; and they to whom mercy is shown, are thereby relieved. These things are good and profitable to men.

But a second reason for preferring these to acts of worship, is, that while the latter show respect to God in profession only, the former manifest it in deeds. If a man who has hitherto lived a heathen, becomes a convert to Christianity, submits to baptism, and joins the visible church,—in all this he but makes a profession. If he attend all the externals of God's worship, still these amount to nothing more than a profession. Their whole import is comprised in calling Christ, "Lord, Lord!" But justice, truth, and mercy are *deeds*, things more solid and substantial. These are a better and a stronger evidence of the inward temper. A man's character is more known by the general tenor of his actions, than by his verbal professions.

Among those who professedly place the whole of religion in disinterested benevolence, are sometimes found the most selfish and mercenary characters in the whole community. Great pretensions to religion, high and loud professions of it, are generally suspicious; especially when they hold forth claims to *exclusive* religion. Exclusive Christians, and exclusive patriots, may, without any breach of charity, be supposed to be equally

hollow. Real religion, like her divine Author, is "meek and lowly in heart." She studiously shuns whatever is showy or noisy. She seeks not to attract the attention and praise of men. Her mild and silent influence she never wishes to display, having no other solicitude but to be known and accepted of God. Hence her virtues appear not so much in profession as in practice, according to the exhortation of St. John, to "love, not in word or tongue only, but in deed and in truth." In no way can we honour God and religion more than by showing our respect for them by our moral virtues.

A religious profession, good words, and good promises, accompanied with bodily exercises and outward observances, cost but little. To the depraved heart, it is much easier to perform all these things, than to resist the allurements of pleasure, decline the advantages of falsehood and fraud, forego the gains of extortion, subdue the selfish propensities, and answer the various demands of justice, truth, and charity in our intercourse with our fellow-men. Whoever, from a respect to God, steadily and uniformly abounds in these fruits of true religion, must be "an Israelite indeed." But the rites and forms of worship, and an evangelical profession and faith, may be reconciled with the reigning propensities of the depraved heart. Have we never seen a covetous worldling,

a griping usurer, a hard-hearted miser, professing himself a Christian, and, with much apparent devotion, attending the special ordinances of God's worship? Many come before him as his people, while their heart goeth after their covetousness. They seem to hope that by honouring God with their lips, they may be excused from obeying him in their lives. If they be deficient in good works, they endeavour to be sound in the articles of their faith; and by doubling their homage to God, compensate what is wanting in their charity to men. But what father of a family will accept the show of extraordinary respect to himself from a child, who, by this artifice, seeks to atone for his habitual misbehaviour towards his brethren and sisters? Much less can such an attempt succeed with the great Parent of the universe. He "is not worshipped as if he needed any thing, since he giveth unto all life, breath, and all things." Our goodness extendeth not to him, but to our fellow-men. Our respect for him is to be chiefly manifested in our kindness to them. Our returns of gratitude to him, are to be expressed in doing good to them. He has constituted them to be his receivers. "Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man." But with respect to God, "look up to the heavens and see, and behold the clouds which are higher than thou. If thou sinnest, what

dost thou against him? or if thou be righteous, what givest thou him?"

From the subject of this discourse, my brethren, we learn that revealed religion, in laying this stress upon the moral virtues, is gloriously distinguished from all false religions. Modern Judaism and Mahomedanism, together with all the different systems of paganism, principally consist in their respective rites and forms of worship. But while the votaries of these religions are anxious for nothing but the accurate performance of their ritual ceremonies, the followers of Christ are taught to believe that the essence of their religion is not meat and drink; that it consists not in outward ordinances or bodily exercises, but "in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" that its first and fundamental principle is the "love of God," and that on this foundation is to be erected the whole structure of christian virtue and holiness.

Hence we are furnished with a criterion by which to try the different systems among professed Christians. They who, holding the faith as it was once delivered to the saints, give the most substantial proofs of it in the abundance of their good works, must be considered as approaching the highest to the truth as it is in Jesus; while they who place the chief stress upon mere speculative opinions, or on forms of worship and a parade of ceremonies, are undoubtedly strangers to the spirit of genuine Christianity.

Wherefore, to conclude, let it be our care, my brethren, in forming our religion, not to confine it to articles of faith, or forms of worship, but to remember that its essential principles are to be exhibited in the practice of the social virtues. The truth is, that the one we ought to do, and not to leave the other undone. We must be universal in our obedience. Religion and morality, prayers and alms, must accompany one another. Both are necessary to form the character of sincere Christians. Though morality be of more importance than forms of worship, yet neither of them will avail to our final salvation in the contemptuous or wilful neglect of the other. When these two sorts of duties come in competition, religious duties must yield to works of charity and mercy. "Go," says the Author of our religion, "and learn what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice." Though the former is to be first and principally regarded, yet the latter is not to be neglected. In modern times, the chief danger seems to be on this latter extreme.

Among the present men of the world, there are many who profess a respect for virtue, and affect to value themselves on their truth, probity, and public spirit, while they are avowedly indifferent to religious duties, and seem to consider them as founded on uncertain and shadowy speculations, and beneath the attention of enlarged and enlight-

ened understandings. But such characters must be reminded that, whatever good deeds they may perform, whatever virtues they may pretend to practise, yet, if a principle of obedience to God, if a respect to him, be not their motive, they cannot look to him for their reward. If they be influenced by their own honour, fame, and reputation in the world; verily, in these things they have their whole recompense; and can expect nothing from God, as they do nothing from a religious regard to him. It is certain that whoever performs any duty from a principle of obedience to God, will from the same principle make conscience of all other duties, and of course will aim at an universal obedience. This, and this only, will prove us to be real Christians. Then shall we not be ashamed, when we have respect to all the divine commandments.

SERMON XX.

REMEMBERING CHRIST.

LUKE xxii. 19.

This do in remembrance of me.

THUS spake our Saviour when instituting the ordinance, called the "Lord's Supper." The celebration of this gospel ordinance is the duty here enjoined. The best of Christians have so much remaining corruption, such a body of sin and death within them, and are exposed to so many temptations from without—their minds are liable to be so overcharged with worldly cares, that they need every help to keep alive in their hearts a suitable sense of divine things. We should be in danger, my brethren, of a most criminal forgetfulness of our blessed Redeemer, did we not often repair to his table, and there renew in our thoughts the remembrance of what he has done and suffered for us, and of what we owe to him. Such a memorial of him must be acknowledged as both wise and gracious. In its appointment, our divine Master

has consulted our profit not less than his own honour. The nature of the institution in all its parts, its whole form, rites, and actions, are calculated to exhibit Christ, to give us views of him, especially in the article of his death, the most impressive and affecting. It is a lively representation of his sufferings for our sakes, and of the benefits which those sufferings have procured for us. In this commemoration of him, we behold him symbolically crucified before our eyes ; we express our belief of the reality of his death for our sins, according to the account given of it in his word. We acknowledge the necessity of such an atonement, of such a price for our ransom, for the purchase of our pardon and salvation, without which we should have been liable in our own persons to all the tremendous evils implied in the curse of God's violated law. We acknowledge all the superlative blessings tendered in the Gospel to be the fruit of his merits, and express our ardent desire to obtain them by complying with the gospel terms. Our eating and drinking at the table of the Lord, denote our hearty reception of Christ with all his benefits, our union to him by faith and love, our penitential grief and sorrow of heart for having pierced and wounded him by our former sins, our hope of forgiveness through his atoning blood, and our firm resolution, by divine assistance, to live devoted to him for the future ; that as we now put on Christ Jesus the

Lord, so we will walk in him, in obedience to him and imitation of him, humbly depending on him for grace here and glory hereafter.

The tendency of such devotional acts and exercises to nourish and strengthen the divine life in the souls of believers, and to build them up in faith and holiness, cannot be questioned. If we have any desire to improve in piety, or any taste for its pleasures, must we not, my brethren, delight in attending an institution so happily adapted to answer these purposes and to promote the welfare of our souls. In this ordinance we, guilty worms, sinful dust and ashes, are admitted to have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son, Christ Jesus. As often as we attend it, a visible token or seal is put upon that everlasting covenant of grace, well ordered in all things and sure, into which we are admitted by faith in Christ. On his part, it is a pledge of his faithfulness in fulfilling to us the promises of his word; on our part, it is a renewed engagement of fidelity and perseverance in the dedication which we have made of ourselves and of our all, to him and his service. It is also a recognition of those labours and sufferings of his, by which this covenant, with all its privileges and blessings, has been procured. It is a memorial of that death, which has bruised the serpent's head, destroyed him that had the power of death, and wrested from death its sting—from the grave, its

victory; which has purchased life for a world dead in sin, and thrown open the gates of a blessed immortality for the welcome admission of all those who believe and obey the Gospel. Thus significant are the transactions to which we are called by the injunction in the text. "This do in remembrance of me," must, when its import is duly considered, be a pleasing command to those in whose view Christ is precious. To illustrate the obligations, and urge the motives, which should induce Christians to obey it, is the design of the present discourse.

It is matter of regret that there should be occasion for such frequent exhortations to this duty. But, alas! what a falling off, not only from this, but from all the other institutions of our holy religion, has been witnessed by those of us who are advanced in life! To what can this be owing? The Gospel has not, in itself, depreciated, nor lost any degree of its intrinsic worth. It is still, what it was deemed to be by the heavenly hosts at our Saviour's birth, "glad tidings of great joy to all people." It is still a "savour of life unto life" to them who believe, the wisdom of God and the power of God for the salvation of their souls. It is as important and interesting to the present generation of men, as it was to their fathers who are already gone off the stage. All the attacks of its enemies upon it in modern times have been baffled, their objections answered, their pretended doubts

solved, their cavils detected and exposed. Its truth and credibility have triumphed over all opposition, and been rendered more illustrious by the repeated examinations—by the many severe scrutinies, which they have sustained. Still however there is a strange, unaccountable backwardness, not only to accept, but even to listen to its offers. Perhaps it may be queried whether it be so clearly, fully, and persuasively preached, latterly, as it was in the days of our fathers. Undoubtedly it is incumbent upon its ministers seriously and anxiously to inquire whether some culpable remissness, some defect on their part, may not be influential in occasioning this lamented indifference in those who should be hearers. May the God of mercy pardon the numerous imperfections of the present speaker, and furnish supplies of grace to render him more diligent, earnest, and faithful!

In the mean while, he is thankful that, amidst the acknowledged degeneracy of the times, the lukewarmness of many, and the absolute indifference and carelessness of a yet greater number, his ministrations are honoured by the attendance of an assembly composed of characters so generally respectable. He has the satisfaction to believe that, among his stated and usual auditors, there are few persons whose lives are grossly immoral, or who openly indulge in habits and practices inconsistent with the christian character and profession

He has observed with pleasure the exemplary conduct of one and another, indeed, of many persons amongst us, who yet have not, by an explicit profession, taken upon themselves the obligations of the christian covenant. To this description of persons the present address especially and immediately applies.

In various respects, my friends, ye testify your esteem for the religion of Christ and your regard for most of its institutions. In conformity to his appointment and in obedience to his authority, you forbear your worldly occupations and amusements, and sanctify the Lord's day, regarding it as holy time, dedicated to the service of God, your Saviour. By your regular attendance upon public worship, you seem to love the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honour dwells. You join in prayers and praises to him, and in a serious attention to the instructions of his word. By all these acts you reverence his ordinances, and seem to delight in these approaches to God. But, after thus regarding the common duties of the sanctuary, when the Lord's table is spread, and his death, the basis of all our hopes, is to be commemorated, ye hurry away with the greater part of the assembly, as though you had no interest or concern in this discriminating peculiarity in the religion of Christ. Such we are told, was the conduct of heathens in the first ages of Christianity. They, as spectators, occa-

sionally attended the assemblies of the Christians, but withdrew when the christian mysteries were to be celebrated. On no account would ye have it believed that your conduct proceeds from a similar principle. Ye have perhaps been baptized into the name of Christ, and by this badge of subjection to him, arrayed, like servants in the livery of their master. Far from renouncing his name or wishing your obligations to him to be set aside, you have no idea of any other religion but his, or of any other name given under heaven among men, whereby ye can be saved. All your hopes rest upon him. But with these hopes how can you reconcile your continued neglect to obey him in this article of showing forth his death?

When a thing altogether arbitrary is imposed upon us, or required of us, if we see no reason for the appointment, and no valuable purpose to be answered by the observance of it, we are prone to consider it as unimportant, and its neglect unblamable or in a measure excusable. But surely you cannot entertain such thoughts of the commemoration of your Saviour's death. Were the subject, in itself, incomparably less interesting than it confessedly is, it would still merit the most respectful notice. Do not all nations agree in eulogizing the virtues, and in keeping up, by various methods, a grateful memorial of those personages among them, who have been eminently useful in their day, the

apparent saviours of their country, or illustrious for their public benefactions? If they have made great sacrifices for the good of the state, if they have hazarded, and, especially, if they have lost their lives in its defence, what monuments are erected to their honour! With what zeal are their names recorded in the annals of fame, and celebrated in history! How often are seasons set apart professedly to commemorate them, and with what alacrity does posterity unite in testifying respect to their memory! Can you, my hearers, pretend to be the friends of Christ, while you refuse to join the number of his professed friends in remembering him? Can you believe yourselves indebted to his love for the eternal salvation of the Gospel, and yet be indifferent towards the memorials of such astonishing love? Can you flatter yourselves that you have in your hearts, a principle of affection and gratitude to the Redeemer, while you persist in neglecting what he has left in charge to be observed by all his friends and followers? How often has his command in the text been repeated in your hearing, "Do this in remembrance of me," yet you do it not.

You will not pretend that the thing in itself is difficult to perform, or improper, or unsuitable to answer the purpose of the institution. Had it been left to ourselves to determine in what way, or by what means, to perpetuate the memory of

Christ and of our obligations to him, what symbols could have been chosen, better adapted than those which he has appointed? How easy, as well as proper, and suitable, is this mode of remembering him! When Naaman the Syrian leper, thinking himself and his application slighted by Elisha, turned away from the door of the prophet in a rage, his more considerate servants thus remonstrated: "My Lord, if the prophet had bidden thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much more, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean!" Had Jesus Christ, my brethren, enjoined some difficult, painful, or very expensive rite, as significant of what is exhibited in the eucharist, should we have hesitated to perform it? Would not love, and gratitude, and a desire of the blessings which he has purchased, have constrained us to the utmost exertions in performing whatever he should have required? How much more, then, when the action directed is one of the most natural and easy;—when he enjoins it upon us as his children, dutiful towards him, and affectionate towards one another, often to meet at his table, and there, in a joyful recollection of him, our great Deliverer, to eat bread, and drink wine, the one broken, the other poured forth, as symbols of his body broken, and his blood shed for our sakes, an expiation for our guilt; and while we thus look upon him pierced and wounded by our former sins,

to resolve, by assisting grace, to grieve and wound him no more. What can be more easy and reasonable, what more pleasant and delightful than such an institution? If with reference to his commands in general, Christ has said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden light," how manifestly true must the observation be of this ordinance in special!

The vows attending it, do indeed impose restraints upon our passions and lusts; but they are such restraints as our own reason and conscience must dictate as necessary to our happiness. Can any serious and virtuous mind be cautious of blocking up the wide gate? Can he wish to see the way to ruin still lying open before him! Can he be fearful of being bound too strongly to persevere in holiness? Can ransomed souls, those ransomed by the blood of Christ, be afraid of coming under obligations to their Redeemer, too strict? Can they think it too much to live to him who has died for them?

My brethren, all the commands of Christ are binding upon us, whether we ourselves acknowledge their obligations or not. Our recognition of his laws and explicit consent to them, are not necessary to their validity, and can add nothing to the power, right, and authority over us, of that great Legislator by whom they are enacted. If we obey them, it is well; if we obey them not, it is at our peril. We are responsible, and, for every allowed failure,

must answer to that impartial judge, who will by no means clear the guilty, nor wink at the wilful transgression of any one of his commands ; who is also able to save and to destroy to an extent infinitely surpassing all human thought, all human conception. On no occasion, can we have any rational inquiry but this, namely, What is his will? This being known in any given case or instance, nothing remains for us but readily and sincerely to obey. There are many things conscientiously performed by some of our fellow-christians, of which we may be in doubt whether they be duties incumbent upon ourselves or not. But no Christian can doubt of his obligations to obey the command in the text. It is so plain and express, that there is no room to evade its authority, and no plea can be urged sufficient to excuse its neglect. By turning to your bibles, you will find that two other of the Evangelists besides Luke, have explicitly recorded the words and transactions of the original institution. In the first epistle to the Corinthians, you find a fourth repetition of them, and there learn that they formed a part of that immediate revelation which Paul received from the Lord Jesus when he was commissioned to be an Apostle. You also find that wherever this apostle, in the execution of his commission, made converts and formed them into a church, he enjoined upon them the observance of this ordinance. Thus he delivered

it to the Corinthians at the time of his first preaching among them. After his departure, when he heard of the irregular and irreverent manner in which they observed it, his spirit was greatly moved, and he was earnest and zealous to correct such abuses. Disturbed however as he was at their misbehaviour, he does not hint to them that it would be better wholly to omit the institution, nor can this be inferred from a single expression used on the occasion. Faulty as they were, they are still required to attend the sacred table, but fervently exhorted to do it hereafter with decency, reverence, and piety.

My hearers, if this duty were of so little consequence as is implied in the practice and affirmed in the language of some among its neglecters, why have the inspired writers insisted so largely upon it, and so often repeated its injunction, accompanied with explanations and directions? What other duty is the subject of more frequent, or of more explicit discussion? What part of the Gospel will you obey, if you persist in disobeying this? May you not frame excuses for the neglect of any other duty as plausible as any that you can urge for the neglect of this? The want of requisite qualifications is perhaps the most general pretence. But might not this, with equal reason, be offered as an excuse for the neglect of prayer and praise, of all private and public devotion? Nay, in this way,

might ye not excuse voluntary ignorance of the Scriptures, of all the doctrines and duties of religion? “If they who know their Lord’s will, and yet do it not, shall be beaten with many stripes;” if religious knowledge will enhance the future condemnation of those who fail of being sincerely religious; may not all who have any doubts of their own sincerity, excuse themselves from the means of religious instruction, lest, by attending them, they should ultimately bring upon themselves an heavier condemnation? Ye see how unfounded and unsubstantial all such excuses must be. If ye fear the doom passed upon the man who, in the parable, came without a wedding garment, ought ye not also to fear the resentment expressed against those who slighted the invitation? Will you venture openly to disobey Christ, in order to avoid the danger of insincerity in your attempts to obey him? As we have much to hope whilst honestly attempting our duty, have we not also much to fear while persisting in its neglect? Can ye foresee what consequences may follow from your continued omission?

The ill tendency of the example which ye set before your family, friends, and all who are likely to be influenced by your conduct, is manifest and undeniable. You are leading them into the neglect of the memorials of their own redemption. You are leading them to disregard an ordinance

intended to keep up a remembrance of Christ in the world, and be a monument of the truth of his religion till his second coming. Were all to follow your example, this memorial of him would cease from among men. As it was originally appointed to promote our growth in grace, is there not danger that, by neglecting it, ye may become less susceptible of good impressions, and more and more estranged from the power of holiness? Or if you should still retain a sense of religion, may it not prove at last, when you shall find yourselves on a sick and dying bed, a subject of regret and concern, of disquietude and dejection, of remorse, if not of despair, that ye have never complied with this part of your duty?

With what solicitude do we perform the last commands of our dying parents and friends! The command in the text was among the last charges given by our Saviour to his disciples. "The same night in which he was betrayed," with his dying breath, he said to his followers, "Do this in remembrance of me." While the traitor was concerting measures with his enemies for his arrest, and they were all busily plotting his death, he instituted this memorial of it, and with his disciples first celebrated it himself as a part of his own preparation for the solemn scene. My hearers, may the command of such a friend, given on such an occasion, be disregarded? If all our hopes beyond the grave

rest upon him, is not the remembrance of him important and even essential to our being prepared for death? When you think of this change as approaching, when the deaths of others admonish you of the uncertainty of life; when you bring the thought home to your bosoms, that within a few weeks or days, you may be called to follow those gone already, have ye no anxiety for the consequences? Can ye be sure of salvation while ye neglect the very things by which ye are commanded to make your calling and election sure? We know not the day or the hour when our Lord will come either by death or at the judgment. In general, we are warned that it will be sudden and surprising to all who delay their preparation. If this warning should fail to influence those who neglect the memorials of his death, yet it ought surely to quicken those of us who attend them, to do it with reverence and godly fear, and to see to it that our lives be answerable to our high and holy profession, circumspect and blameless in all other respects, as well as in regard to the positive institutions of religion.

SERMON XXI.

WALK TO EMMAUS.

LUKE xxiv. 35.

*And they told what things were done in the way,
and how he was known of them in breaking
of bread.*

NEVER, perhaps, were pious minds more dreadfully disappointed, more confounded and astonished, than were the disciples of our Saviour, on witnessing his expiration on the cross. The weakness and timidity which they betrayed on his first apprehension, and during the process of his trial, seem to have been the natural effect of their general habits and character. Plain and simple minds, educated among the lower classes of society, always accustomed to reverence their civil and religious superiors, and to stand in awe of their authority, were naturally panic-stricken when they saw the man to whom they had most intimately attached themselves, arrested by an armed force commissioned by the supreme council of the

nation. They wished to witness his innocence, to bear a testimony in his favour, that might clear him of whatever was alleged against him ; but they had never appeared at such a tribunal, and had no talents to speak or plead on such an occasion. Their first consternation was so great, that they instantly dispersed in different directions, each consulting his own safety. They could not, however, forget their beloved master. Though they dared not themselves make any attempt for his relief or aid, yet they undoubtedly hoped that *he* would find some method to effect his own deliverance. Having witnessed, in so many illustrious instances, his supernatural power, the thought must have occurred to them, that he who rescued Lazarus from the power of death, and brought him up out of the grave, could not be at a loss how to save himself on the present emergency. Even while he was hanging suspended upon the cross, some feeble hope was probably entertained, that he would at length, by a miraculous effort, to the confusion of his enemies and the astonishment of all the spectators, come down from the cross unhurt and triumphant.

But when he had actually given up the ghost, and after his dead body was deposited in the tomb, the faith and hope of his disciples were more than staggered. The deepest gloom overwhelmed their minds. He had indeed, while he was yet with

them, repeatedly warned them of the things which had now taken place ; but they never realized nor understood those expressions which predicted his approaching death. That he was to die and rise again, though so often foretold, were events of which they had no conception, nor the most distant apprehension. All that they had heard upon these subjects, struck their minds as dark sayings, inexplicable mysteries, into which they did not attempt to penetrate. Having been his chosen attendants through the whole course of his public ministry, whom he had adopted, instructed, presided over, and cared for as children ; whose interests were blended with his own, as members of his family ; towards whom he had uniformly shown all the marks of the most endeared friendship ;— they felt his death as a wound to their tender passions, and a privation of their enjoyments, greater and more dreadful than they could have suffered by the demise of any other relative,— while no language can describe, nor any imagination paint the blast which it seemed to bring upon their hopes and prospects.

They had viewed him as more than man, a messenger from God, a prophet greater than any of their former prophets,—nay, they had acknowledged him as the son of God, the true and promised Messiah, whose coming their whole nation fervently desired and had been long expecting.

Under this persuasion, they had become his disciples, and had relinquished their earthly all to follow him. They had considered his doctrines as the words of eternal life, and had made him the basis of all their hopes, as well as the object of their supreme affection ; confiding in him as that mighty Saviour who would rescue Israel from every foreign yoke, vanquish all their enemies, and establish the long expected kingdom of God among men. So full and fixed had they been in these ideas of him, that Peter, before he was put to the test, hesitated not to declare his readiness to die in defence of them. But, to their utter amazement, they had now seen this Prince and Saviour, whom they had deemed superior to all opposition, taken up and proceeded against as an impostor. And, on his public trial, instead of vindicating his claim to be the Messiah, in the presence of the assembled rulers,—bearing down, and silencing their objections,—they had seen him sinking, and apparently crushed under their power. Instead of sitting upon the throne of David, receiving the homage of his subjects, they had beheld him suspended on the cross, a spectacle of scorn to the world,—forsaken by God, given up a victim to death, and swallowed up by the grave ; while his enemies were every where exulting in his death as that of a great deceiver.

These events occurring so contrary to all the ideas of the Messiah entertained by the disciples, and to all their expectations from him, it is not perhaps possible for us fully to enter into their feelings, or to conceive the tumult of thought, the confusion and agitation of mind, which they must have experienced during the interval from his death to his resurrection. Circumstanced as they were, and endued with the sensibilities common to honest, upright minds, their distress must have been unspeakable. No men, before or since, ever were or could be in a situation precisely similar to theirs ; where such vast interests and prospects were suspended upon what appeared to them so dreadful an uncertainty.

Not the interests of the present handful of disciples only, but those of the whole human race, from the first progenitors down to the last succession of their posterity, were involved on that occasion. It was the general hope of man that was seen trembling on the point of suspense. Had not Christ *risen*, the whole scheme of human redemption must have failed. The faith and hope of God's people throughout all ages, must have proved vain and unfounded. As he died for our sins, so he rose again for our justification. His resurrection sanctioned and established that religion which comprises the present and future well-being of the whole species ; a religion which is

the support of the weak, the confidence of the humble, the refuge of the miserable, the relief of the distressed ; at the same time that it is not less interesting to the greatest, the most powerful, and most exalted among men,—being adapted to all ranks and all situations in life, to all times, places, ages, and nations ;—a religion whose spirit disengages its votaries from all terrestrial objects, and fills their minds with the prospects of immortality ; which purifies, refines, exalts, and ennobles their thoughts and affections, inspiring them with a sense of the dignity of their nature, and of the great end of their designation ; which associates them with the spirits of heaven, and teaches them to look forward to eternity as their inheritance ; —“ a religion so majestic in its simplicity, so sublime in its doctrine, so magnificent in its object, and so astonishing in its effects, that its very nature, to all who duly reflect upon it, demonstrates its divine and heavenly origin.” This religion, with all it comprises, rests on the fact of the Saviour’s resurrection, and remained problematical till that fact was ascertained.

Undoubtedly some of the disciples recollected the hints which he had given, that he should rise again on the third day, but none of them seem to have expected it. His enemies also remembered these hints, and therefore they set a watch over the sepulchre, to prevent his disciples from stealing

him away by night, and not from any apprehension that he would actually rise. Of this they had little fear, and his disciples as little hope. The minds of the latter were so possessed with the general prejudice of their nation, that the Messiah "should abide forever," that when he was dead, they gave up all for lost. Humbled, mortified, covered with confusion, and sinking under the prostration of all their hopes, how exquisitely wretched must have been their feelings! On the morning of the third day, however, they were suddenly surprised with the report of some female friends, who had made an early visit to the sepulchre. At first, no doubt, a gleam of hope darted in upon their minds; but the gloom soon returned. On further reflection, the greater part of the Apostles were inclined to attribute the report of the women to some illusion on their senses, or to consider it as the mere vision of their disturbed imaginations. On the whole, their words were regarded as "idle tales;" and as the day advanced, the important fact, so far from being ascertained, remained in the most anxious suspense at the time when Cleopas and another disciple set out on their journey to Emmaus, a village between seven and eight miles distant from Jerusalem.

In the character of a stranger going the same way, Jesus joined company with these travellers,

and having noticed the concern of their minds, so strongly depicted in their countenances, inquired the cause of their trouble, and the topic of their discourse. "What communications are these which ye have as ye walk by the way, and are sad?" But though he entered with such admirable facility into the subject of all their doubts, clearing them up, and showing the propriety and necessity of the things which had happened, by quotations from Moses and all the Prophets, —expounding and applying these prophecies to the present events, and pointing out their agreement with each other ; yet all this while, these disciples had not the least suspicion that it was their Lord himself who was conversing with them. They were, notwithstanding, so agreeably entertained, edified, and comforted by his discourse, that they would take no refusal of their invitation to him to spend the night with them at their lodgings. When supper was ready, as they came to the table, the stranger, to the wonder of all present, acted as head of the family ; took bread, blessed, then brake and distributed it to the company. As Jesus performed this act in the same manner in which he had been accustomed while he was yet with them, it was a circumstance which could not fail to open the eyes of the disciples, and effect the discovery which he had hitherto avoided. It led them to fix their eyes upon him more intently

than they had done before; when, to their unutterable astonishment and joy, they instantly knew him, and saw plainly and infallibly that it was their beloved master himself.

Being now known, he instantly withdrew from their sight, before they could acknowledge or embrace him. Their satisfaction and joy, however, were complete, and too important and transporting to be confined to their own bosoms. They hastened to make the communication to their still mourning brethren. Late as it was, they set out that very hour of the night on a speedy return to the city. They found the Apostles and others with them assembled together, and before they had time to begin their story, were saluted with the annunciation, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." Then the two travelers went on and "told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread." Thus it pleased him who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, in compassion to his weeping followers, by discovering himself to them on the very day of his resurrection, to turn their darkness into light, their deepest sorrows into joy ineffable. What a transition from the depths of dejection and despondency to the utmost elevation of hope, and exultation the most triumphant!

With respect to ourselves, my christian brethren, though we are not, in the present state, to expect a similar corporeal vision of Christ; though we may not hope, while here on earth, to see him with our bodily eyes; yet it is certain that in a spiritual sense he is seen by true believers while here on earth. To them he comes, and to them he makes the most gracious discoveries of his perfections and glory. They know him with a knowledge of which others are destitute. In attending upon his ordinances, especially in the "breaking of bread" in remembrance of him, he is sometimes made known unto their souls, in a manner which fills them with joy and peace in believing.

As this kind of knowledge essentially consists in discerning, admiring, and adoring the moral beauty, excellence, and glory of Christ; so its tendency is to assimilate us into the same image, and fashion us into a resemblance to him who is the object of our love and devotion. Some of the principal lineaments and features of his character are indelibly stamped upon all who possess a saving knowledge of him. They have the same mind in them which was in him, and are led by his spirit. The ends sought by him, the great and elevated views by which he was governed, have an influence upon them. They are anxious to conform to the model which he has set them—to

copy after him in his indifference towards worldly objects, in his zeal for the divine honour, and submission to the divine will ; in his humility, meekness, patience, disinterested benevolence to mankind, and unwearied endeavours for their salvation. These characteristics of the Saviour, are, in a measure, the discriminating features of all who have truly known him. "We all," says the Apostle, "with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord."

Here, then, my brethren, is the criterion by which we are to judge of ourselves, whether we be truly acquainted with the Redeemer or not. If, upon an impartial review, the proofs should seem to be in your favour, still you will not rest in past discoveries. In every approach to the ordinance before us, you will draw nigh with earnest desires to see Jesus. On the present occasion may he be made known to each communicant in the breaking of bread ! May we all, in beholding him symbolically crucified, entertain such views of his perfections and glory, as shall render us henceforward like him, unwavering in our faith in him, steadfast in our imitation of him, and in our obedience to him, that he may dwell in us and we in him.

SERMON XXII.

COMING TO CHRIST.

JOHN vi. 68.

Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

IN the verse but one preceding the text, we thus read: "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." They had hitherto followed after him, and attended upon his preaching; but taking umbrage at some of his doctrines, and finding no encouragement for their carnal views, they withdrew to their secular pursuits, giving over all hope and expectation from him. Being thus forsaken by numbers who had professed themselves his disciples, our Lord saw fit to try the faith and constancy of the twelve Apostles, by saying to them, "Will ye also go away?" You see me deserted by the crowd. It is at the option of all, whether to abide with me or

not. I detain none against their will. If ye mean to leave me, now is the time, when so many set the example. To this, Simon Peter, whose natural warmth of temper rendered him forward on every occasion, answered in the name of the rest: Lord, if we were disposed to leave thee, "to whom should we go?" Whither should we turn ourselves, where look, or in whom confide as a leader to true and ultimate felicity? "Thou hast the words of eternal life."

My hearers, what Peter here says of the instructions dispensed by Christ himself during his personal ministry, is to be understood of his Gospel. In this, and in this only, are contained "the words of eternal life." Though the man Christ Jesus be long since passed into the heavens, yet, as the Saviour of the world and the Head of the church, he is still present wherever his word and ordinances are duly administered. In every country and among every people favoured with the light of the Gospel, Christ is still preaching in their synagogues and streets, inviting men to become his disciples, and to approve themselves his sincere followers. All christendom profess a regard for him, and, in some sort, attend upon his instructions. But among these multitudes, there have been many, through each successive age, who, stumbling or taking offence at his doctrines, have professedly or practically renounced all relation to

him. This is a guilt not chargeable upon the heathen nations. They who have not known Christ, nor sustained a professed relation to him, cannot be said to forsake him. Of course, their condemnation will be far less aggravated than that of those who perish from under the Gospel. With reference to the unbelieving Jews, our Saviour says, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they would not have had sin," that is, no sin comparable with that of which they are now guilty, by rejecting me and my doctrines. This should be regarded as an awful admonition to ourselves against copying after them in their unbelief. By his Gospel, Christ has come and spoken unto us; but many among us attend not upon his instructions. They turn their backs upon his word and ordinances, and show that they love darkness rather than light. Not a few, like the unbelieving Jews of old, complain of mysteries in the Gospel, and deeming them too hard and difficult for their faith, openly avow the principles of infidelity.

My hearers, were the question to be put to ourselves, "Will ye also go away?" should we universally answer, with the firmness and confidence of Peter in the text, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." In so saying, after duly weighing the subject, Peter expresses a full and perfect conviction that

by Christ alone we have any hope of future and everlasting felicity. A similar conviction would undoubtedly be produced in each of our minds, did we consider the case with that attention, interest, and concern, with which it was regarded by Peter and his brethren. It is the object of the present discourse, to recommend it to those who are under temptations to forsake Christ or to disregard his religion, seriously to consider to whom they will go, or where they will look for happiness, after having relinquished the hopes of the Gospel. "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

In all men there is a natural thirst after happiness. Who will show us any good? is the general inquiry. We feel our own emptiness and insufficiency, and are constrained to look without ourselves for the objects of our felicity. The Gospel points us to Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. To them who believe and obey him, it promises present peace and durable felicity hereafter. But if we forsake him, to whom shall we go? Ought we not to consider with what we shall part, when we turn away from his religion? The world by wisdom knew not God. By the Christian revelation we have received the good knowledge of him, and how to serve him acceptably. It also instructs us in every branch of virtue, and in the right government of ourselves upon all occasions. It sets

before us a system of morals so perfect, that in proportion as they prevail, they effectually secure the highest social felicity. It enforces its moral duties by doctrines and motives as cogent and weighty as imagination, in its utmost stretch, can conceive. As sinners, it tenders us grace to pardon our past offences, and to assist our repentance and return to virtue. It solves our doubts with respect to our future destination; dispels the darkness, which, through the lapse of so many ages, overspread the territories of the grave; assures us of a future resurrection from the dead, of a general judgment, and of everlasting happiness or misery in a future world, according to our good or ill conduct in the present state.

If our minds be well established in the belief of these principles, and we suffer them to have their due influence upon us, they will purify our hearts and lives, refine and ennoble our nature, elevate and dignify our character, assuage our sorrows, calm our fears, animate our hopes, and ultimately crown us with life everlasting. Is such a religion to be discarded?

It is earnestly wished that those among us who hesitate to become followers of Christ, who are backward to embrace his religion, whose hearts are set upon the attainment of a happiness different from that which is comprised in the christian scheme;—it is earnestly wished that, in the neglect

of this, they would seriously consider what their prospects can be. The propensities of the carnal mind and our worldly affections, do indeed prompt us to embrace worldly objects, and to place our chief good in the acquisition of wealth, honour, power, and the pleasures of sense. But reason has been given us as the regulator of our conduct ; and can reason approve of this choice ? If you “make gold your hope,” if to become rich and great in the present world be your plan ; should you not consider whether these objects be attainable, and whether, when attained, they will answer your expectations ? With views and hopes like these, most men, perhaps, begin the career of life. But of the multitudes who thus set out, how few succeed ! Such is the state of things in the present world, and the constitution of human society, that it is not possible for a large proportion of its members to be distinguished for abounding wealth. A vast majority, be their exertions what they may, must inevitably miss of such attainments. After various schemes and projects, after years spent in the hurry and perplexities of business, we daily see numbers failing even of mediocrity, and, in some instances, sinking into that meanness of condition which had been always their greatest dread.

In the road of ambition, the hazards are still greater than in that of avarice. It is known

beforehand, that among the numerous candidates for honour and power, here and there one only can succeed. The disappointed rivals suffer a chagrin and mortification, grievous and bitter in proportion to the strength of their desires and the height of their previous hopes. In some instances, their minds become the prey of passions so uneasy and tormenting, as to render them, of all men, the most wretched.

If you miss of wealth, you can neither live in splendour, nor indulge in expensive pleasures. But we will admit that these things may be within your reach; we will suppose you possessed of riches, ample as your desires, and sufficient for the ease and indulgence of many years. Thus circumstanced, would you be secure of the expected enjoyment? Would the gain of the whole world set you above the calamities incident to human life? On how many quarters might evil still approach you! Your body would be still liable to pain and disease, your character to reproach, and your dearest connexions to sickness and death. How manifold are the casualties which might break in upon your enjoyments and render you miserable! But we will suppose you, for a while, to be borne along on a full tide of prosperity, and all things around you conspiring to your ease and pleasure. Solomon had all this, all that the most worldly, ambitious, or sensual could wish; and after making

the experiment, reprobated the whole, leaving it upon record as a solemn warning to posterity, that these things are so far from constituting happiness, that they are but "vanity and vexation of spirit." Experience teaches that every condition has its peculiar inquietudes, troubles, and crosses. Under the glare of outward prosperity, secret discontent and dissatisfaction are often realized. In the greatest abundance of earthly joys, the heart is often sad. The mind soon nauseates the pleasures of sense, and cannot rest in present enjoyments. It is always looking forward to something future, wishing to change the scene, and hankering after some new, untried gratification. Were you to become acquainted with the real situation of those who make the fairest outside show of happiness, you would find it a show, and nothing more. You would find them harassed and tossed like the troubled sea, as remote from contentment and satisfaction as others.

If you persist in fancying that it would be otherwise with you ; if you still say, Give me the means and trust me to make myself happy with them ;— we will suppose you in the full possession of them, and also of a secret for enjoying them in a manner more exquisite than any who have tried them before. Yet in the midst of all the pleasures which they might procure you, would you not be aware of your constant liableness to be forever separated from these objects of your happiness ? What was

the enjoyment of the man, seated, as ancient story relates, in the palace of a prince, with all its luxuries about him, but who, at the same time, knew that a drawn sword hung over his head, suspended by a single hair? Should we admit the possibility of your excluding this gloomy apprehension from your thoughts—that you might sink, as some seem to do, to such a degree of insensibility, as to eat, drink, and be merry, in expectation of “tomorrow’s being as this day,”—would the coming of death be the less speedy, certain, or terrible, because thus unthought of? Would eternity be the less awful, because wholly unprepared for? Would a few months or years of pleasure be a balance for succeeding ages of ages of misery? Would the remembrance of the gaiety and splendour in which you once lived on earth, render the blackness of darkness less gloomy, and the regions of despair less dreadful? It is in vain for any to flatter themselves with the hope of escaping these, if they now live without God in the world. If the Maker of us, and of the world in which we dwell, holds us responsible to him for our conduct, for the use which we make of our advantages and opportunities, of the talents and goods with which he has entrusted us; if there be a God who judges in the earth, exercising a moral government over the world, and who, in the world to come, will give to every man according to his works; if you admit

these fundamental principles of all natural, as well as of revealed religion ; you must be convinced that unfaithful stewards, that those persons who walk in the way of their hearts, and after the sight of their eyes, serving divers lusts, habitually unmindful of God, rioting in his bounties, abusing his goodness, despising his grace, and defying his justice, can have no hope at the period of their being turned out of their stewardship. With consciences thus loaded with guilt, what must be their prospect, when called to render up their account at a tribunal where strict, impartial justice will have its course !

Consider this, ye who forsake Christ, to go in pursuit of the world. Such must be the end of all those whose portion is in this life. Under the assured prospect of such a conclusion, what happiness can the world afford ? So far as man is a mere animal, and on a level with the brute creation, it may furnish him, as it does them, with the means of animal enjoyment. But as a rational, moral being, the offspring of God, and the heir of eternity, it must be all husks and ashes to him, containing nothing suitable to his nature, or adequate to his desires. After all its flattering allurements, it miserably disappoints the expectations of those who make it their main scope. I have said the more upon this topic, because it is so common and natural for us to run into this mistake, because

such numbers are earnestly looking and assiduously seeking to the world for that which the world can never yield them. "They spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not."

My hearers, if it have been shown that happiness cannot be derived from the world, nor from the things of the world, where next shall we look? From religion, the wisest and best of men in every age have agreed that it must be derived. But if you forsake the religion of the Gospel, what other religion will you embrace? After reviewing all the different species of religion which have prevailed in the world, which will you adopt as having the greatest probability of truth, being in itself the most rational, the most worthy of God, and the best adapted to guide your pursuits after happiness? Having turned away from following Christ, whom will you follow? Next to him, the Arabian prophet has perhaps, at this day, the greatest number of votaries. Having rejected the Bible, will you believe in the Koran? To get rid of the mysteries of Christianity, will you credit the absurd tales of a most lewd and cruel impostor? Or will you make your choice among the systems of ancient or modern paganism? What ideas the mere heathen have of God and of his perfections, and how they worship him, may be learned from the Prophet's description of a man, who, cutting down a tree,

with part thereof kindleth him a fire and warmeth himself ; with part thereof baketh his bread and roasteth his meat ; and “ with the residue thereof maketh him a god, and falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me, for thou art my god !”

Will you betake yourselves to the ancient sages and philosophers, those men of renown who once flourished at Athens and Rome, for direction in the way to happiness ? The wisest of these frankly confess their ignorance and incapability to afford you the light which you are seeking. They acknowledge their doubts upon points of the greatest moment. Though convinced of the absurdity of the vulgar religion, they know not how to frame and introduce a better. Their most illumined writings contain a strange mixture of wisdom and folly, and abound with uncertain conjectures. They are not agreed with respect to the nature of true happiness, nor in what it consists. Amidst their various and discordant opinions, by what criterion will you determine which is the best, or how will you bring your reason to acquiesce and confide in any of them ?

Leaving these, will you adopt what modern Deists tell you is the pure, unadulterated religion of nature, and which they extol as preferable to any that is, or can be revealed ? Strip the schèmes of these men of the aids derived from revelation—let them restore to Christ, his Prophets, and Apos-

ties, the light which has been borrowed from them,—and their systems will be found no better than those of the old philosophers. Having seduced you from the harbour of the Gospel, they leave you without helm, compass, or rudder, to the winds and waves.

Will you then, rejecting all former schemes, disdaining every guide, from the exuberance of your own invention, from the plenitude of your own wisdom and knowledge, will you frame a religion for yourselves? Apply then to the subject—make the experiment, and see if, after turning from the Rock of ages, you can lay another, a new foundation, upon which you can venture to build for eternity; upon which you can safely depend as a basis that will stand unmoved when the foundations of nature shall be shaken and give way. Alas! vain man, what canst thou do? It is high as heaven; it is deep as hell; the measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. Behold, an immensity is around thee, and an eternity before thee! What canst thou know, upon what canst thou determine? Couldst thou search into the abyss of the divine counsels; hadst thou lain in the bosom of the Eternal mind, and inspected the volume of his decrees; couldst thou survey, in its unlimited extent, that chain of events, which, begun in time, runs parallel with an endless hereafter;—couldst thou pretend to these things, then perhaps thou mightest conclude

upon something which would not disappoint thee. But who, or what, art thou? worm of the dust, insect of a day, born a being of but yesterday, and knowing nothing!

Ah! my friends, "to whom shall we go?" Shall we return to the ancient religion of the Jews, to Moses, and the Prophets? They refer us back again to Christ. They all testify of him as the only foundation of hope for sinful men, the only source of happiness and salvation for a lost world. The law was intended as a schoolmaster to fit and prepare men for the reception of the Gospel. It was the shadow of good things to come. Christ and his doctrines are the substance. It was through faith in a Messiah to come, that the Old Testament saints desired and sought another, a better, a heavenly country. Through this faith they entered into that rest which remaineth for the people of God. This rest, no longer faintly apprehended through the smoke and fire of sacrifices, clouds of incense, and a multiplicity of shadowy, emblematical institutions, is now explicitly and clearly revealed in the Gospel of Christ. His are "the words of eternal life." Of this, Peter and his fellow-disciples had a full and unwavering persuasion, and therefore, in answer to the interrogatory in the text, said, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" They saw that his character, his teaching, and miracles, corresponded with the

prophecies concerning the Messiah which had gone before. Though they did not at present fully comprehend the meaning of all his instructions, yet they so far understood him, as to be convinced that he taught a religion worthy of God, adapted to the condition of apostate men, and opening to them the most encouraging and glorious prospects of futurity. The reasonableness and excellence of his doctrines in themselves, and the manifold proofs of his divine mission exhibited before their eyes, rendered them confident that *his* were the words of eternal life, bringing immortality to light, and pointing out to a lost and bewildered world, a way of recovery and restoration to true and endless felicity.

My hearers, the Gospel of Christ, comprising all these things, has been transmitted to us, under as many circumstances of credibility, as perhaps the nature of the thing will admit, or as we could reasonably expect. By our knowledge of it, we become acquainted with "the words of eternal life." By believing and obeying it, by living as this grace of God, bringing salvation, teaches, we shall approve ourselves to be of the number of the sincere followers and disciples of Jesus, and with them become entitled to his promised blessings. How rich, how great, how ineffably glorious are his promises! Through him we shall receive the atonement, the propitiation for our sins. Through

him we shall receive a righteousness justifying us before God, and securing our acceptance with him. Through him we shall be cleansed from all sinful pollutions, and be transformed into a moral resemblance to God. This good work begun in us here, will be carried on to perfection hereafter. Though while we continue in the present world, we shall still be liable to tribulation, yet he assures us that in him we shall have peace, a peace which passeth understanding. He will give us to eat of the hidden manna ; he will feed us with the bread of life, during our pilgrimage through this wilderness. On our departure hence, while passing the dark valley and the shadow of death, his rod and staff shall comfort us ; while flesh and heart are failing us, he will be the strength of our hearts and the portion of our souls. At the final judgment, before the assembled universe, he will acknowledge our relation to him, and welcome us into his Father's house, into those mansions which he has prepared for our reception—mansions above the reach of all evil, forever exempt from the temptations and trials of this vale of tears, where we shall behold his unclouded glories, and, with an innumerable company of angels and all the nations of the redeemed, participate in rivers of pleasure and fulness of joy, world without end. This is that " eternal life" exhibited in the doctrines, in the words of Christ.

My hearers, will ye, notwithstanding, turn from him? "Will ye also go away?" What can this world, or the god of this world, offer you, though he should cause to glitter in imagination before you, all its glory and riches, sufficient to induce you to give up a system so excellent, to relinquish expectations so great, to part with prospects so glorious? Will not your hearts reply to every temptation, to every suggestion of this kind—"Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

No, blessed Jesus, we will not leave thee. Though the doctrine of the cross be to some a stumblingblock, and to others foolishness, yet to us it is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Blessed Jesus, thou art the Captain of our salvation, and by thy grace we will follow thee till we overcome, and sit down with thee on thy throne, even as thou also hast overcome and sat down with thy Father on his throne.

SERMON XXIII.*

THANKSGIVING SERMON.

GENESIS i. 31.

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.

IN these words we have the review which the Almighty Creator took of his new made world, the reflection of the Eternal Mind upon the copies of its own wisdom and the products of its own power. The several component parts of this great work as they were successively produced, were each pronounced *good*; but upon the finishing of the whole, the superlative style is adopted. It is pronounced *very good*, or perfect, without any blemish or defect which might bring into suspicion either the wisdom or the goodness of its Creator. To his omniscient eye it appeared, not only supremely beautiful, but

* This sermon was delivered on Thanksgiving day, December 5, 1822—the last time that the Author ever appeared in the pulpit. He was attacked the following night by the illness which in six days terminated his life.

perfectly conformable to the plan concerted in his eternal counsels, and completely adapted to answer his purpose in its formation.

As we ourselves were not present, and mingled not in the circle of the sons of God who shouted for joy at the laying of its foundations,—it is only through faith in the writings of Moses that we understand “how the world was made.” Looking through this glass, we see the formation of its several elements; the light shining forth from the midst of primeval darkness; the firmament expanded; the stagnant abyss of chaotic waters collected into seas, lakes, and rivers; the dry land appearing; the mountains rising; the plains extending; the vallies sinking; and the surface of all, clothed with the endless variety of vegetation. We also see the heavens garnished, and all their radiant luminaries lighted up,—the earth, the air, and the waters replenished with those numerous species of animals, which, according to the adaptation of their different natures, inhabit each their respective elements.

When creation is thus far advanced, when the house is thus built and furnished, amply stored with whatever can be of use to such a tenant; man, the only rational organ of the world, the head and representative of the other creatures, to whose dominion they are subjected, and who alone is responsible to the great Creator for his tribute of

praise from the whole—man, with a capacity to contemplate, acknowledge, and adore the infinite power, the unsearchable wisdom, and inexhaustible goodness so illustriously displayed in the new formed world—*man* is then produced in the image of his Maker, receives his benediction, and, by his express grant, is put in possession of all these his works, as their overseer and the steward of the great Proprietor. Nearly six thousand years have elapsed since the date of this first lease to our great ancestor, and during the many revolving ages through this whole space, the world has been continued in the possession of his family. By how many successive generations of men from Adam to Moses, from Moses to David, from David to the times of the Messiah, and from the times of the Messiah down to this day, has the world been possessed, enjoyed, and, alas ! too often abused ! Its present possessors, however, receive it fresh and fair from the hands of its Maker, without any visible symptoms of impair or decay. Besides producing, nourishing, and sustaining through unbroken succession all the tribes of animals and all the swarms of insects which were at first created, it has been the seat of all those great nations and mighty empires, which, through every era of past duration, have been alternately rising and falling, flourishing and spreading themselves on the earth, and then dwindling away. On this great stage

have been exhibited all the vicissitudes in human affairs, those scenes, transactions, and events, recorded in ancient as well as in modern history—whatever wise men and philosophers have discovered, poets celebrated, orators recommended, statesmen counselled, or heroes achieved. Here they have all acted their respective parts. Here the righteous have sought for glory and immortality; and here the wicked have treasured up wrath against the day of wrath. In this vast inn have lodged all those millions of travellers and pilgrims, whose exit hence, through every successive age, has increased the population of the realms of light and joy above, or the regions of darkness and sorrow below.

But though the world be in itself so old, though it has passed through the hands of so many different owners already—has been possessed by more than one hundred or two hundred generations of men in succession; yet to us, its present tenants, it is as new, and its workmanship as bright, as it was to its first possessors. Still it bears, equally vivid as at its first formation, the impressions of divine power, wisdom, and goodness. It still exhibits the eternal power and godhead of its Maker, and witnesses his overflowing goodness to his creatures.

On a day professedly set apart to thank and praise him for this his goodness, it undoubtedly becomes

us, my hearers, fixedly to contemplate the fair inheritance which he has given us. "The heaven, even the heavens," says the Psalmist, "are the Lord's; but the earth hath he given to the children of men." This earth then with all its contents and appendages, which in the text is pronounced "very good," is the donation which we have received from him. In the arrangement of our thoughts upon the subject, the medium by which it is presented to our view claims our first grateful notice.

In the beginning of the creation, light was the first production. "God said, Let there be light; and there was light." The light which was thus the work of the first day, was afterward, on the fourth day of the creation, collected into that immense body of light and heat, which we call the sun. This glorious luminary in the heavens, so often mistaken by the heathen nations for God himself, was ordained to rule the day. By virtue of this decree the day-spring is made to know his place; the sun, rising at his appointed hour, showeth himself "as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it." His beams are thrown in a rich profusion over the whole face of the earth, and all objects susceptible of their influence, are cheered, and gilded, by their light and heat. How manifold, and unspeakably great, are the benefits

which they produce! Without them, to what purpose would be the organs of sight in animals, and all those preparations in nature which depend upon the kind influences of the heavens? This earth would be uninhabitable,—a cold, barren, opaque mass of matter, buried in everlasting darkness. Light is not only pleasant to the eye, but necessary to the life and subsistence of the whole animal and vegetative creation. It is not only necessary to the carrying on all the affairs of the world, but to the pleasure which we enjoy in the view and contemplation of all the innumerable objects around us. Of all our senses, vision is the greatest inlet of pleasure. Through this avenue an uninterrupted stream of delight pours in upon the thinking mind. How exquisite is our enjoyment when in the cheerful light of day we behold this ample creation, all its grand and entertaining objects, their beauty, splendour, and usefulness! In the view of these created glories, the mind is naturally led to contemplate, and, in a measure, to enjoy the uncreated glories of their great Author. Thus vision, to which light is essential, originates pleasures of various kinds, sensitive, intellectual, and even spiritual. From this source indeed many of our most refined and sublime enjoyments are derived.

As all the different parts of the creation are reciprocally subservient to each other, and conspire in their respective natures and places to the general

beauty and usefulness of the whole ; these beneficial effects of light are greatly facilitated and increased by another equally important and necessary appendage of this earth. The whole globe is wrapped in, and surrounded by a fluid nearly as subtile and active as light itself, and perhaps more penetrating. Its formation immediately succeeded that of light, constituted the work performed on the second day of the creation, and, in the context, is called “firmament” or heaven. But as the literal meaning of this word in the original Hebrew is *expansion*, and as the noun is derived from a verb importing “to stretch forth, distend, or expand in every direction,”—it obviously expresses the nature of the air or atmosphere, which, being peculiarly elastic, is of course expansive and compressible. It is certain that the whole space which we behold and commonly call “heaven,” is nothing but air. Its diffusion is supposed to extend, in a degree, to the limits of the planetary system ; extremely fine and rare no doubt at remote distances, but more dense and gross in proportion to its proximity to the earth—so gross indeed, as to be capable of supporting all those clouds and vapours, which are the grand reservoirs from which the earth is continually watered, refreshed, and rendered fruitful. This firmament which God has spread over us as the pavement of his feet, forms the breath of our nostrils, swells the lungs, and is the grand instru-

ment of respiration and life to all the inhabitants of the earth. Nay, it is scarcely less necessary to whatever composes the vegetative creation, to the life and growth of all trees, plants, and herbs. It is found that when any of these are deprived of the air, they soon lose their glory and verdure, become weak and sickly, and appear in a languishing and dying state.

Besides furnishing breath and life to whatever lives, and growth to whatever grows, this useful element gives buoyancy and flight to all the feathered tribes; and even to the various species of the finny race supplies the power of playing up and down, of ascending and descending at pleasure in the watery depths. The influence of the air is also blended with all those great and useful operations in nature by which the world is preserved in an habitable state. By reflecting and refracting the rays of light, the beams of the sun are more generally diffused and so tempered as to be easy and agreeable to the eye. By this means, too, the day is protracted after the sun is actually set at night, and is anticipated again in the morning while he is yet many degrees below the horizon. Thus is formed that agreeable space, recurring twice a day, called the *twilight*. Nor may we pass unnoticed the unspeakable usefulness of the air as a medium for the conveyance of sound. Without the former, the latter could not exist. Where then

would be the melody of the creation, all the charms of music, or the pleasures of social converse? No articulate language could be formed, the organs of speech in men would be to no purpose, the ears of all animals would be useless. Profound and universal silence would reign throughout the world. Can we think of our senses of seeing, and hearing, and of the adaptation of light to the one, and of air to the other; and not admire the contrivance, the wisdom, and goodness of Him who has thus made us and the air in which we breathe, hear, and speak; and the light by which we see ourselves and all his other works around us?

The great usefulness of the air would soon be lost, were its whole mass, with all those vapours with which its lower regions are constantly loaded, perpetually at rest. A stagnant atmosphere would soon become putrid, unfit for respiration, and the bane rather than the life of the inhabitants of the world. Should we not then admire the provision made in the system of nature for guarding against this noxious state of the air, and for preserving its salubrity by continual ventilations by gales and tempests, by the explosion of electrical vapours, and the falling of rain, hail, and snow? If these agitations of the air occasionally become boisterous and formidable, yet they are exceedingly useful in carrying off and dissipating poisonous exhalations, and in cooling and purifying the element which is the immediate instrument of life.

Notwithstanding the apparent levity and expansive nature of the atmosphere, it feels the influence of that power which we call attraction or gravity, so far as is necessary for retaining it with a due degree of density in its place and station around the globe. This power, inexplicable in its cause, is inherent in all the elements of which the world is composed, and in the bodies of all those creatures by which it is inhabited. It consists in the tendency which all material things have to a common centre. The centre of the earth is the point to which its whole mass, with all its appendages, tends. This tendency is what is called the weight of bodies. It is greater or less in proportion to their distance from the centre of attraction. The only cause which we can assign for gravity is the immediate power of God impressed as a law upon all the atoms of matter at their first creation, or unremittingly exerted in their continued preservation. The beneficial effects resulting from this law of gravity are not less obvious and striking than those of any other of the most useful laws of nature. It is the cement or chain which holds together the different parts of which the system of the world is composed; and retains them in their respective places and stations, constantly equipoised within the bounds prescribed to them at their first formation. Through the invincible strength of this chain, no part of the earth is shattered, disjointed, fritter-

ed off, or dissipated in the circumambient space; notwithstanding its perpetual movements, its daily rotation upon its own axis with a rapidity which carries its surface through the space of a thousand miles every hour, giving us the agreeable vicissitudes of day and night; and its annual circumvolution round the sun, in which it travels over the immense spaces of the ecliptic, delighting us with all the variety of the seasons. Amidst the inconceivable as well as unremitting rapidity of these different motions, gravity preserves, undisturbed through the successive ages of the world, the unity, order, and harmony of all its parts. Besides these, its great and general uses, its particular and occasional advantages to the inhabitants of the earth are more than can be numbered.

From the brief survey already taken of some of the outworks and appendages of this lower creation in which there is nothing wanting, nothing redundant, nothing ill made or ill adjusted,—are we not, my brethren, overpowered and dazzled with the splendour of those evidences which it exhibits of the being and perfections of its Maker? Are not those men lost alike to reason, and to all moral feelings, who are capable of remaining unconvinced by such evidence, and unimpressed by such marks of wisdom, and goodness?

We no sooner look at the out-buildings, the gardens, the avenues, and various accommodations

surrounding a stately palace, than we instantly imagine what must be the architecture, magnificence, and convenience of its interior apartments. In the fabrick of the world, the latter are in proportion to what has been already remarked on the excellence and perfection of the former. The magnitude of the structure strikes us with astonishment. How are our minds overwhelmed when we reflect on the power which at first formed, and continues to wield, and to manage, with more facility than we play with a little ivory ball, a body of so stupendous a bulk as this terraqueous globe! The great and signal advantages of its spherical form, and of its situation with respect to the other planets in the solar system, securing to it a due proportion of light and heat, are also among the proofs of the perfect wisdom and goodness of its Creator. Nor is the display of these perfections less illustrious in the admirable distribution of the earth's surface into waters and dry land;—the former into vast oceans, and smaller seas, lakes, fountains, and rivers;—the latter into continents and islands, mountains and vales, spacious plains, and hilly countries. If to an ignorant or inconsiderate observer, some of these divisions seem like a chance-medley, the casual strokes from nature's unguided hand, or chasms with rude heaps of confusion—the effects of some great convulsion and mighty ruin; yet upon a closer inspection and more extended survey,

wise and beneficent design may be every where traced over the face of the world, bespeaking the line and compass of the unerring Architect, proportioning and balancing the various parts of the whole. Thus the earth and the waters are so divided as to form an equipoise to each other on all sides of the globe. To the Northern, is opposed the Southern ocean ; to the Atlantic on the east, the Pacific on the west. The great continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa in the Eastern hemisphere, are balanced by the long extended regions of North and South America, in the Western half of the world. In the general distribution of the waters among and around these spacious tracts of dry land, provision is made for the continual and universal ascent of those vapours which afterwards fall in dew and rain upon the earth. The process of this operation is favoured by ridges of lofty mountains towering in each of the great divisions of the earth above the clouds, and serving as alembics for the collection and condensation of the vapours. In those mountains also are for the most part the springs and sources of those streams of running water which, in their progress towards the ocean, become mighty rivers, winding in various channels through every continent, fertilizing the neighbouring banks, facilitating the commercial and social intercourse of human beings, and affording a pas-

sage for the inhabitants of the sea to come up in shoals to the doors of men.

We have now taken a brief survey of some of the great component parts of this lower creation, and found in each of them striking illustrations of the assertion in the text, that every thing which God has made, is *very good*. In them we have traced displays of goodness, as well as of wisdom and power, in all respects worthy of the supreme and all-perfect Being, the great Father of all existence and life. With these manifestations of his glorious attributes before our eyes, must we not feel ourselves constrained, not only to acknowledge and adore him, but to love, reverence, and obey him?

Having contrived and finished, as an habitation for men, this earth, he did not cast it by as a neglected work. No, not even after they had proved themselves unworthy of it. He continued, and he still continues, to uphold and superintend both it and them. On this transitory abode the many generations of our forefathers have experienced his care, and enjoyed his goodness. We ourselves, my hearers, are now, in our turn, called into existence. Our lot is fallen in a pleasant place, and we have a goodly heritage. In an age abounding with remarkable incidents and the most striking vicissitudes, we have found ourselves placed on an eminent and distinguished part of the great theatre, not

only as the spectators of his works both of creation and providence, but as the receivers of all the variety of his bounty. From day to day he renews upon us the tokens of his goodness, causes the morning and evening to rejoice over our heads, and each returning season to present us its richest blessings. The year is again crowned with his goodness.

If we have reason to discern the force of evidence, and hearts to feel the obligations of goodness, shall we not resolve to live henceforward in God's world as in an august temple, appropriated to his service and always inhabited by his presence? Awed by his infinite majesty, will it not be our care, in our whole deportment, both towards him and towards one another, to render ourselves approved in his sight?—that our future lives may be a perpetual hymn of praise, and that ourselves, soul and body, may become living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to him, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON XXIV.*

SAFETY OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

PROVERBS xii. 28.

In the way of righteousness is life; and in the path-way thereof there is no death.

THE “way of righteousness” is, unquestionably, the way of rendering unto all beings with whom we have any connexion what is respectively their due—unto God, the things which are his; unto our fellow-men in all their several relations, the things due to them; and upon all occasions, in our whole conduct, the governing ourselves by the rules of right reason and the precepts of revelation. In this way the text affirms, “there is life, and no death.” In the language of Scripture, the terms *life* and *death* import, the one, safety, prosperity, and happiness, the other, danger, evil, and misery. The meaning of the text therefore is, that they who enter and persevere in the way of

* It may not be uninteresting to the reader to learn, that the latter half of this sermon was Dr. Osgood's last composition.

rectitude, not only escape the miseries and dangers which sooner or later overtake the workers of iniquity, but secure to themselves all those blessings and enjoyments, which are essential to the happiness of rational, moral beings. This praise is given to a virtuous, religious course of life, for the purpose of recommending it to the choice of all, and especially of young people, who are about setting out in the world, and commencing that career which must end in the extremes either of life or death forever.

To minds unbiassed by corrupt passions and prejudices, the way of righteousness is of all others the most natural and easy of discovery. They have only to open their eyes, and they see it lying straight before them. "God has shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what he requires of thee," in the dictates of thine own reason and conscience, and in the plain precepts of his holy word, which he who runs may read. The way before him is marked as with a sunbeam. If it be narrow, still it is straight, and free from all those turnings and windings backward and forward, which characterize the ways of sin. "Let thine eyes look right on, and thine eyelids straight before thee. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left." So obvious is the way of righteousness to those disposed to follow it, that they rarely need any other guide than their own uprightness. This, of itself, prompts them to whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure,

and virtuous. "The righteousness of the perfect shall direct their way." Or if, on any emergency, they should be at a loss what course to pursue, they know where and to whom to apply for direction. With the Psalmist they may pray, "Shew me thy ways, O Lord ; teach me thy paths ; lead me in the way that is everlasting. O let me not wander from thy commandments." As the prayer of the upright is God's delight, it will assuredly be heard by him, especially when supplicating for that wisdom which is from above. To them who in sincerity ask this of God, he giveth liberally. In every case of doubt and difficulty they "shall hear a voice behind them, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." In this way of holiness, the way-faring men, though fools, or in themselves ever so simple, yet shall not err on any point, or on any occasion, essential to their ultimate safety and happiness. To as many as have a heart to work righteousness, and desire to know the will of God that they may do it, all needful light and direction are promised. They shall not walk in darkness. At no time during the course of their pilgrimage, will the divine precepts be hidden from them so as to suffer them to fall into any fatal mistake. Their path will be as the rising light, shining more and more unto the perfect day. So direct, plain, and luminous is the way of righteousness.

But when the text asserts that, in this course, life is found and no death; are we to infer that the travellers are exempt from all the misfortunes and sorrows of the world, and enjoy uninterrupted success and prosperity? This contradicts, not only fact and experience, but the explicit assertion of the same inspired writer, who elsewhere informs us that, with respect to worldly objects and concerns, "all things come alike to all," time and chance happening to every one without any respect to character,—that "there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked,"—that neither love nor hatred can be known by the worldly incidents befalling them, or the worldly circumstances in which they are respectively placed. While they live, both lie open to the same vicissitudes of joy and sorrow; and, at death, both pass the same gloomy vale. "Wise men die, as well as the fool and the brutish person." In what sense then is it asserted in the text, that "in the way of righteousness, there is no death?" The meaning undoubtedly is, no real absolute evil or misery, the temporary trials and sufferings of the righteous being intended as mercies in the end, as a necessary discipline for their ultimate good, working out for them a far more, an exceeding, eternal weight of glory. Even death itself proves a gain to them, and more to be desired than was the day of their birth. This being the result to good men of all those trials and events which

are grievous to flesh and blood, they are, on this account, denied to be evil. On the contrary, they are upon reflection what ought to be desired. The good man himself in the midst of his sharpest sufferings, could he see to the end, and have a clear view of their happy consequences, would not wish to be exempted from them. In this sense nothing deserving the name of *death* ever occurs in the way of righteousness; while on the other part, comforts and joys are experienced truly worthy to be called *life*.

In the hearts of all the righteous, the love of God has been shed abroad. He is the object of their chief desire. To him they feel themselves supremely attached. It is the language of their hearts, "Whom have we in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that we desire in comparison with thee. Thou art our portion, O Lord, our shield, and exceeding great reward. We esteem thy favour to be life, and thy loving kindness better than temporal life." To all who entertain these sentiments of God and feel these affections towards him, he is a friend and father. Having thus acquainted themselves with him, they have peace with him and peace in their own bosoms, a peace which passes understanding. This love to God is accompanied with love to men, with complacency in the saints, and with good will towards all without exception. This love to our brethren is in-

separable from the love of God. Both reign together in every heart where either of them is implanted. The Scripture pronounces that man a liar, who professes love to God while he indulges in hatred against his brother.

Let us now consider what must be the happiness of that man who is united to God, to the saints, to all holy beings, and to the general good of the universe by the spirit of love,—whose heart and life are under the sway of this divine principle. No iniquity has the dominion over him; no lust or irregular passion gains the ascendancy in his heart, or the control of his will and affections. He is conscious of no ill intentions, tortured by no remorse, haunted by no fear. A conscience void of offence both towards God and man, renders his mind serene and tranquil. His bosom is the seat of order, harmony, and peace, undisturbed and unruffled by any of those agitations which render the inward feelings of the wicked like the troubled sea. If he thinks of God, all his meditations upon him are accompanied with admiration, gratitude, and praise. He sees and acknowledges the divine perfections in his own formation and in that of the universe around him. In all his comforts and enjoyments, his advantages and privileges, he realizes and tastes the divine goodness. He enjoys the Creator in his creatures. By these streams his heart is led to exult in the Fountain. He feels a

nearness to God, and says with the Psalmist, "I am continually with thee—all my ways are before thee." Of course, he is habitually disposed to set the Lord always before him, and to remember that this infinite Being is the constant inspector and judge of all his thoughts, words, and actions. Thus he walks with God, and has a steady aim to secure his favor by unceasing efforts to be like him, to imitate his holiness and goodness, his mercy, truth, and faithfulness.

As all the divine perfections are comprised in love, and as the children of men are the objects here on earth, in whose creation, preservation, and redemption, the love of God is principally displayed,—all the sincere followers of God become fellow-workers with him for the general good of mankind. They cordially concur with his plans of benevolence, and, so far as they are able, assist in carrying them into effect. They come forward as auxiliaries for enlightening, reforming, and ultimately saving the lost race of men. Next to the love of God, this object is nearest and dearest to the heart of every righteous and good man. His ardour to promote it, not only prevents his being overcome of evil, but leads him to overcome evil with good, to render good for evil, blessing for cursing, and his prayers to God for those who despitefully use, abuse, and persecute him. When he looks abroad upon his fellow-men at large, though he cannot but

apprehend that many of them are exceedingly depraved, vile, and even malignant; yet, among them all, there is not one whose eternal salvation he would not rejoice to promote by almost any series of personal privations, mortifications, and self-denial. Such are his sentiments and feelings, respecting both God and his fellow-men. In acting righteously, he acts like God, is a follower of him, and unites with his views as they are manifested in the order of his creation, in the dispensations of his providence, and in the discoveries of his word. Will it be questioned whether the man who begins and perseveres in such a course, lives in the best sense and to the most worthy and desirable ends?

But whatever estimate may be put upon his present enjoyments, who would not wish to share in his future hopes and prospects? The wages of sin are death, but the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever. If we admit the moral character of the Deity, if we believe him to be of purer eyes than to behold evil, or to suffer it to dwell with him, we must assuredly infer that all who work righteousness will meet his approbation. Various as are the opinions entertained concerning the procuring grounds of pardon, the gospel method of justification, and the terms of reconciliation and acceptance with God, it is, I believe, universally conceded, that no truly righteous and good man

will be finally rejected and excluded from heaven. *His* admission is certain, whoever else may come short—though the door should be shut against some who, while here on earth, had been eminent and distinguished for their privileges, their learning, their gifts, their miraculous powers, their ecclesiastical dignities, having been occasionally, in the church militant, triple-crowned pontiffs, mitred bishops, and canonized saints.

As the future wellbeing of the righteous is thus independent of all the nice controversies concerning modes of faith and forms of worship ; no more is it affected by that diversity of opinion which men hold concerning the punishment of futurity, and the execution of the threatenings in Scripture against the wicked. These threatenings apply not to any righteous person, in what sense soever they may be interpreted. Some have the boldness to deny that there will be any punishment after this life. They affect to believe and teach that even the men who die in their sins, with all their imperfections on their heads, will, by the passage of death, effectually escape their penal consequences, and to their unspeakable joy find on the other side of the grave a general amnesty in their favour. In modern times, among the many rare discoveries and boasted improvements in theological knowledge which mark the present era, this opinion surprisingly prevails, and is become a doctrine of all others the most popular.

The advocates of a second opinion contend that the existence of the wicked will be extinguished by death, or, if after death their spirits should survive, and for a while retain their consciousness during an interval of suffering, that those sufferings will at length terminate in annihilation, in a reduction to their original nothing, in the being as though they had never been,

"lost
 In the wide womb of uncreated night,
 Devoid of sense and motion ;"

and that this is what is meant by the "second death" and "everlasting punishment." Others, again, tell us that the punishments of the future world will be similar to those of the present, all disciplinary, inflicted for the ultimate good of the sufferers, to bring them to repentance and reformation, and that this sooner or later will be the happy result, conducting at last all the wretched victims of vice, over what has been deemed an impassable gulf, to the realms of light, where they will share with Lazarus in the comforts of Abraham's bosom. There is yet a fourth opinion, which is thus literally and explicitly announced in Scripture: "These," meaning the wicked, "shall go away into everlasting punishment, prepared for the devil and his angels," having their portion with those for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever, whose worm nev-

er dies, whose fire is never quenched, and the smoke of whose torment ascendeth forever and ever.

However this language of Scripture may be construed—whichever of the above meanings may be given to it, must it not occasion some alarm to the irreligious and ungodly? Speculate as they may upon these topics, can they feel themselves quite at ease and secure with respect to what may await them hereafter?

On the other part, not the threatenings of Scripture, but its promises, belong exclusively to the righteous. These are what they are to inherit, the treasure laid up for them in heaven, and on which they may reckon as their portion. To them it shall be said, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world.” At the winding up of the present scheme of things, “these shall enter into life eternal.” My hearers, is this your character? Have you entered, and are you established in the way of righteousness? In this case you are safe,—safe from all the menaces of God’s word, so safe as to have no cause for fear. At the approach of the king of terrors, you need not tremble. With respect to you, he is disarmed of his sting. With the Psalmist you may say with confidence, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” So far from being an evil, it will prove a refreshing, desirable rest,—a rest from

all the labours, pains, and trials of the present world. Nay, it will be found a transition to the world of glory, into the favourable presence of God and of the Mediator, to the spirits of just men made perfect, the general assembly and church of the first-born, and to an innumerable company of angels,—to participate with them in that fulness of joy and in those rivers of pleasure which flow forever at the right hand of the Most High. Through the mercy and grace of God, may we all, by our own experience in the way of righteousness, learn that it is life, and that in its pathway there is no death!

EXPOSITIONS.

JEPHTHAH'S VOW.

JUDGES XI.

THIS part of Jephthah's history is involved in an obscurity which seems to require elucidation. "Jephthah," says the historian, "vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering." In the event, he was met by his own daughter, leading forth a choir of maidens, with timbrels and dances, celebrating his late victory. As she was his only child, besides whom "he had neither son nor daughter," the sight of her, and the knowledge that she had now become the object of his vow, threw him into such an agony of distress, that he instantly rent his clothes in token of his deep affliction. His daughter, however, upon learning the cause of his trouble, at once consented that the vow should be performed, and declared her willingness to be thus sacrificed, since

it was the price of so much glory to her father, and of so great a deliverance to her country. She only requested that she might be allowed with her young companions to wander up and down for two months upon the mountains of Israel, to lament her virginity. This being granted, she returned at the end of the time appointed, and "her father did with her according to his vow;" that is, according to Josephus, and many other interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, sacrificed her a flaming victim upon the altar. In favour of this opinion, they urge it to be the most natural and obvious construction that can be put upon the words of the historian. They pretend not to justify the deed, but suppose that Jephthah's mind, during the late declensions in Israel, or while he had dwelt in the land of Tob, had become tainted with pagan ideas, and that under such impressions he had made his vow, having in his thoughts at the very time a human sacrifice, as no other creature could be supposed to "come out of the doors of his house to meet him." Dr. Jennings, in his *Jewish Antiquities*, thinks it probable that Homer, on some tradition of this sacrifice, grounded his fable of Agamemnon's sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia. "Indeed," he adds, "the name Iphigenia seems to be a corruption of Jephthigenia, the daughter of Jephthah."

Lord Clarendon, however, shocked at the idea of a real sacrifice, in a spirit as amiable for its humanity, as exemplary for its piety, says, "Me-thinks it is not reasonable to believe, what so many learned men will not doubt of, that Jephthah did literally sacrifice his daughter. I should rather hope that we do not yet understand the meaning of the vow, than that a vow unlawfully and unnaturally made, the like whereof is not in Scripture, should be as unlawfully performed. It seems in the very intention of the vow, that it must be some reasonable creature that was to be offered, for it could not else 'come forth to meet him;' and how such a sacrifice came to be lawful, cannot easily be discerned. The high-priest himself could not offer what he pleased for sacrifice, if it were not of that kind which God had appointed. If Jephthah had met a dog or a pig, he could not have sacrificed it; and he ought as much to have 'rent his clothes,' if any other man's daughter had met him, and not his own; nor is it probable that any other father would have permitted him to do what he might lawfully resist. If the performance of the vow was so obligatory, it was when the Lord had delivered the Ammonites into his hand. How came he to have the power to dispense with his vow for 'two months,' and why could he not have done it for two, or twenty years? Whatsoever is declared to be done

by the Scripture, which is the word of God, I am bound to believe ; but that this passage is faithfully translated, when it contradicts the law of God and nature, and the like whereof was never done, I hope may be innocently doubted.”

These doubts of his Lordship are greatly strengthened, when we reflect that even the heathen were not accustomed to have recourse to human victims, but in times of extreme calamity or danger, to avert the fury of their offended deities. I recollect no instance of them in history after victory, or as a thank-offering for any other blessing received. Shall we then attribute to Jephthah, whose character in all other respects is unblemished, an action more horrid, considered in all its circumstances, than was ever committed by the most ignorant and superstitious pagan ? If he had been thus stained with the blood of his only child, is it conceivable that his name would have been enrolled in the New Testament, among the illustrious examples of faith and piety ? Might we not rather have expected that he would have been stigmatized and branded as one of the monsters in human shape ? Yet we find not the least censure passed upon him through the whole Scripture. In his negotiations with the king of the Ammonites,* we have already observed his justice and

* As the former part of this chapter comprises a portion of Jewish history, uninteresting to the general reader, the remarks upon it have been omitted.

humanity, soundness of mind, strength of understanding and of argumentation, and accurate acquaintance with the laws and records of his nation. He could not therefore have been that weak, ignorant, and ferociously superstitious character, which the supposed sacrifice represents him.

The historian having stated that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, goes on in the very next verse to relate his vow. This connexion might lead us to suppose, that in making his vow, he was under the influence of the Holy Spirit. In this case, however, it is most certain that his vow could not have been what, at first view, it now appears to us. The last words of it in the Hebrew, will fairly admit of this rendering, "shall surely be consecrated to the Lord, or I will offer it a burnt-offering." The Jewish law permitted the dedication to God of persons, as well as of cattle, of houses, possessions, indeed of any kind of property, and it prescribed the ceremonies to be observed in their consecration. The service, use, or profit resulting from whatever was thus consecrated, was afterward devoted to the support of religion or of its ministers. Jephthah, no doubt, had around his house a large farm, plentifully stocked with the various species of domestic animals, which were daily driven from one part of his grounds to another. In making his vow, may we not suppose him to have imagined that on his

return, he might meet his drove of cattle, his flock of sheep, or his herd of goats; and that in this case his purpose was, that a hecatomb of these animals should form his grateful oblation to God? Contrary to his expectations, however, instead of them, he met a troop of damsels with his own daughter at their head. He had no right to dispose of her companions, but it instantly occurred to his thoughts, that the performance of his vow required the giving of her, not to a husband, but to God,—to spend her days in his service, separate from family cares, and exempt from the duties of a wife and mother, in making and adorning the vestments of the priests, or the hangings of the tabernacle, or in some other occupation connected with the service and rites of religion. This incident, therefore, as it dashed his hope of posterity, of any heirs to his possessions and honours, occasioned that disturbance of mind which he expressed by rending his clothes.

In strict conformity with this idea, is the language of the damsel herself upon her being made acquainted with the vow. She answered at once, “My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth.” After a pause, however, she adds, “Let this thing be done for me,” or grant me this request, “Let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the

mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows." Is it conceivable that such cool, dispassionate language could have proceeded from her lips, had she entertained the idea, that she was to be butchered like a beast, and laid upon the flaming altar? Was there ever a human being, who would not have been shocked beyond measure at such a prospect? Can we imagine a tender, delicate virgin, in all the bloom and joy of youth, on her being apprized of such a destiny, expressing no horror, showing no emotion of fear, no aversion, and regretting no other privation but that of wedlock? Was the loss of life nothing, that she wished to lament her virginity only? Being two months at liberty to go where she pleased, if at the expiration of that term she knew that she was to bleed upon the altar, having the tragical scene constantly in her thoughts, as the fatal day drew nearer and nearer, would she not have been tempted to make her escape? Would not her companions have advised and assisted her flight? She returned at the set time to her father, "who did with her according to his vow;" but if this had consisted in laying her a victim upon the altar, after thus relating her death, would the historian have gravely added the following words, "And she knew no man"? Is it not manifest that in this clause is expressed the meaning of the vow, and that it had its fulfilment in her continuing to the end of her

days in a state of celibacy, devoted to the service of religion, and secluded from the common cares and enjoyments of the world?

The remainder of the chapter is thus translated by Houbigant: "And it continued a custom in Israel for the virgins of Israel to go to the daughter of Jephthah, the Gileadite, to comfort her four days in a year." No custom of celebrating the dead after the funereal obsequies were performed, ever prevailed among the Jews. By representing them as *unclean*, and pronouncing every person defiled who approached or touched a corpse, the Mosaic law inspired the Jews with a kind of horror for the dead. Of course, it could not have been a custom with their daughters to make annual visits to the grave of Jephthah's daughter, or lamentations over her. We are constrained therefore to understand these visits as made to her while she was yet living in a state of retirement and seclusion from the world.

In opposition to this, a learned divine has urged, that "the Scripture no where attaches any peculiar holiness to virginity or a life of celibacy; but, on the contrary, predicts that this would be one of the corruptions in those 'latter days,' when men should depart from the faith, and give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils." I answer, that though this be in general true, it is not in its full extent, or without exception. The

Scripture indeed has not enjoined celibacy on any ; yet St. Paul says, "The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit ; but she that is married, careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband." Our Saviour also says, that "as many as are able to receive this doctrine, let them receive it ;" and adds, that some had actually chosen this mode of life, "for the kingdom of heaven's sake." We have also an instance of it in Anna, the prophetess, of whom it is said, that, through the course of many years, to an extreme old age, "She departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." The early piety of Jephthah's daughter, seems to have predisposed and fitted her for such a kind of life, which, in some instances, has undoubtedly occurred through every age of the church and world, under the Law, as well as under the Gospel.

After all, as Jephthah found reason afterward to be sorry for his vow, his example should teach us all to be cautious how we entangle our consciences by hasty resolutions, or rash promises,—bringing ourselves under any obligations which were not before binding upon us. The Scripture says, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God ; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth ; therefore let thy words be few."

THE WITCH OF ENDOR.

1 SAMUEL XXVIII.

THE late death of Samuel, and the disgrace and flight of David, might possibly have encouraged the Philistines to a renewal of the war against the Israelites. Some have supposed, that about this time their forces had been increased by vast numbers of men driven by Amasis out of Egypt. Their army upon this occasion, seems to have been more numerous and powerful than usual. Achish, upon whom the chief command appears to have devolved, having full confidence in the merits and fidelity of David, his lately received guest, proposes that he and his men should join the camp. To this proposal, the answer of David is evidently ambiguous: "Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do." It is however understood by Achish in the affirmative; and on this ground the Philistine prince replies, "Therefore will I make thee keeper of mine head forever," that is, in the military style, captain of his life-guard. But can we suppose that David ever in earnest entertained the thought of fighting

against his country? The Roman orator tells us, that “the connexion created between men, by benefits mutually conferred and received, is very great; but that of all our connexions, there is none more important, none dearer than that which every one has with his country. Our parents are dear, our children, our kindred, our friends, are dear; but our country alone comprehends all these charities for the benefit of which, what good man would hesitate to die? Hence, nothing can be more detestable, than the inhumanity of those, who tear their country in pieces, and are employing their endeavours for its destruction.” Can we then suppose the Hebrew hero capable of a crime so censured and reprobated by Pagans. Undoubtedly David found himself greatly perplexed by the situation into which he had been thrown. To join the Philistines, in fighting against the people over whom he knew God had destined him soon to reign, would apparently cut him off from all right and hope of succeeding to the crown. On the other part, to desert or betray the prince under whose protection his life had been secured, was inconsistent with the principles of honour and honesty. In this strait, his prudence appears in the ambiguity of his answer to Achish. Perhaps it was under a divine impulse that he made this answer. Providence rendering it effectual for his extrication from present difficulties, and so guiding

the subsequent events, as to free him from all future embarrassment.

When the two hostile armies had taken the field, and Saul had reconnoitred that of his enemies, he found it so very formidable, that he lost all his former courage, and his heart trembled at the apprehended consequences of a battle. In this distress, he earnestly wished for supernatural advice how to conduct. But the historian observes that, when "he inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." These words lead us to suppose that he did at first seek counsel of God, though without success; yet we read in 1 Chronicles x. 14, that "he inquired not of the Lord." Perhaps the two passages cannot be better reconciled, than by saying, as some have done, that "inasmuch as he did not *persevere* to inquire of God, nor inquire at all with a truly religious and faithful spirit;" but in his impatience became desperate, having recourse to infernal agents, "it was just the same as if he had not inquired at all." "He whose heart is perfect with God," says a learned Jew, "lifts up his eyes to him, and fixes them on him, hoping in him, though he do not presently hear or grant his request; and perseveres in his hopes, settling a resolution to wait upon him. But so did not Saul, who was remiss and negligent, saying, in the pride of his heart, If the

Lord will not answer me, I will consult a familiar spirit."

Concerning what is related of his adventure with the witch of Endor, various opinions have been entertained. The plain, simple narration leads careless, inattentive readers to suppose that this woman, through the aid of evil spirits, actually called up the ghost of Samuel upon this occasion; while more thoughtful, judicious minds deem it utterly incredible that any combination of human art with infernal powers, should be equal to such an effect. In their opinion, none but the great Father of spirits—that infinite Being who holds the keys of death and the grave, who is Lord both of the visible and invisible world, can cause any of the dead actually to appear and hold converse with the living. His power alone can perform such a prodigy. This seems to be admitted by the pious Henry, while he, notwithstanding, thinks that the fallen angels might attend upon the call of a sorceress. He therefore takes it for granted, that an evil demon, raised by the arts of witchcraft, assumed the shape of Samuel, and, personating the prophet, answered the inquiries of Saul. Upon this hypothesis he founds his remarks and illustrations, and observes, that the profound silence of Scripture with respect to the manner of operation in effecting this, should teach us "not to covet to know these depths of Satan,

or the solution of such mysteries of iniquity." In modern times, however, the efficacy of such arts, any farther than as they consisted in mere illusion, and in deceiving the credulous and unwary, has been justly called in question. They were never credited but in the dark ages of pagan ignorance, or of christian superstition. They were founded in popular prejudice, ignorance, and error. In proportion as learning and knowledge have been diffused, they have become impotent, and sunk into disrepute. Spectres and apparitions have uniformly and almost universally vanished, where men have become enlightened. The evocations of the dead, and intercourse with demons and spirits, mentioned in pagan poetry, are now believed to have been nothing more than the artifices of impostors. Apparitions, when real, are acknowledged to be miracles; and to God only belongs the power of working miracles. It is inconsistent with all our ideas of the wisdom and perfection of his government, to suppose that this power may be lodged in the hands of any finite agents, or can ever be exerted but by a divine commission. The contrary supposition would render questionable all the miracles by which divine revelation is established, and leave us destitute of any certain proofs upon which to found our faith.

Later commentators, therefore, such as Mr. Orton and many others, consider the apparition of Samuel to Saul as a real miracle, produced, not by the arts of sorcery, but by the finger of God. As this seems to have been the opinion of the Son of Sirach in the Ecclesiasticus, of Josephus, of the Jewish Rabbis, and of several of the ancient Fathers of the christian church; modern expositors have supposed, that as God overruled Balaam when seeking for enchantments, and compelled him to utter a true prophecy—as he sent a message of death to Ahaziah at the time when that prince was sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron; so at the instant when Saul was seeking to a witch, the true Samuel was made to appear for his greater terror and punishment, by confirming the immediate execution of the sentence before passed upon him. It might be acknowledged, however, that this opinion, after all the plausible things which can be urged in its favour, is evidently incumbered with insuperable difficulties. After God had refused to answer an impious prince in any of the ways prescribed by his own institutions, is it conceivable that he should send the spirit of an eminent prophet from the abodes of bliss, to meet this abandoned sinner at midnight in the den of a sorceress, to deliver in his name, from that workshop of impiety, oracular responses; and after performing his errand, un-

clothe him again, that he might return to his rest? Can such an interposition be deemed worthy of the Supreme Being? Is not the supposition contrary to all our ideas of the divine purity, dignity, and sanctity? From such a dispensation might not the Israelites naturally infer, that, though they ought not to have recourse to those who deal in necromancy till all the methods of inquiry appointed by their law had been tried without effect; yet, in the last resort, they might chance to succeed, as Saul did? Upon the generally received interpretation, I see not how this consequence can be avoided, a consequence evidently dishonourary to God, contradictory to his perfections, and apparently countenancing wicked arts and practices.

I therefore ask your attention to the history itself, that we may see whether, upon a critical examination, it states any facts or circumstances which may not easily and naturally be resolved into the arts and management of imposture. Saul's application was to "a woman that hath a familiar spirit." The Hebrew words, literally rendered, are "the mistress," or "she that hath power of the bottle, or belly." Impostors of this description were so called on account of their bodies being swollen or distended, as they feigned, by a divine energy or spirit possessing them at the time when they uttered their oracles. By the Greeks they were called ventriloquists, persons

who spoke in, or by the belly. Accordingly, Josephus thus explains the order of Saul: "That they should seek out for him one of those women that could speak out of their bellies, and call forth the souls of the dead; that by this means he might know if his affairs should succeed. For this sort of belly-speakers can bring up the souls of the dead, and by their help can foretel futurities." The meaning of Josephus is, that these are the things to which they pretended, and they supported such pretences by so altering the natural tone of their voice, that though they really spake themselves, they could impose on those who consulted them, and make them believe that their answers were received from the spirit that had been conjured up. This they confirmed by so managing their voice, as to cause it to be heard in any direction or from whatever quarter they pleased; "either above them or below them, or on either side of them; down a chimney, or through a wall, as should best suit their imposture, and most effectually deceive those who applied to them." This art of ventriloquism, instances of which, have occurred in modern times, was probably the main ground on which the witches and wizards of old founded their claim to a power of conversing with demons and with the spirits of the dead, and of learning from them the knowledge of future events.

In his better days, Saul had cleared the land of these impostors, by putting the law of God in execution against them. But as he had never acted from a principle of sincere respect to Jehovah, and in many instances had wilfully and most presumptuously offended him,—he seems at last to have filled up the measure of his iniquities, by falling himself into those vile practices which he had so severely punished in others. For years past he had been far from having a sound mind; and, at this juncture, his panic at the sight of the Philistine army, had nearly deprived him of the small remains of reason. He appears, however, not to have been so lost, as to be unconscious of the disgrace he might bring upon himself, if it should be publicly known that he had applied to a sorceress. He therefore observed as much secrecy as possible on the occasion; and having disguised himself, went by night, and with only two attendants. Her residence was probably at no great distance from the camp. How he disposed of his two servants at the door of her dwelling, we are not told; but there is no hint or intimation that they were witnesses to what passed between him and her, or between him and the pretended Samuel. A present in the first instance probably introduced him and his business, and rendered her propitious to his wishes. His request is, “Divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and

bring me him up whom I shall name unto thee." In so saying, Saul implicitly acknowledges all the supernatural powers and prerogatives to which any witch or wizard ever pretended. "Bring me him up whom I shall name unto thee," wherever he may be, whether in heaven or in hell, above or under the earth, or in any of the regions of space; they must all go and come at thy command, and give forth their oracles to those, who, through thee, consult them. This is the obvious import of his request.

But could the king of Israel, after having been trained up in the knowledge of the true religion, be so senseless, as to believe that the spirits of just men made perfect, the souls of prophets and saints, after entering into the heavenly rest, should be subject to the control of conjurors; and forced by the impious arts of sorcery and enchantment, against their wills, to make a mysterious midnight appearance, and give forth moonshine oracles to wicked men, forsaken of God and given over to the consequences of their own impieties and follies? Is it not yet more astonishing, that any christian divines should have believed this, and put such a construction upon this passage of sacred history?

Extraordinary and prodigious as were Saul's expectations from the woman, she makes no objection to them as things beyond the reach of her art. She implicitly admits her ability to satisfy his

inquiries. The only preliminary question to be settled between them, concerns her own personal safety; and she makes this cautious reply: "Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore, then, layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?" By the living God, Saul swears, that no punishment should befall her in consequence of her compliance. This difficulty being removed, she applies herself to her business, and desires him to name the dead person whom he wished to consult. On his mentioning Samuel, she seems to have withdrawn some little distance from him, probably into a subterraneous cell, from which, in a short time, she gives a shriek, as if in an agony, loudly exclaiming, "Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul." From these words it is evident that her pretended fright is occasioned, not by a vision of the real Samuel, or any other unexpected apparition; but by the information received from her ghost, that the person now consulting her, was the king himself, who had put to death so many of her profession. The truth is, that, from the beginning, she well knew Saul, notwithstanding the disguise which he had assumed. As he was a head taller than any other man in Israel, he was always known at first sight, even by those who had never seen him before. This woman must

also have known him from the promise of impunity which he had given her ; as none but her sovereign could have made such a promise. Her object, therefore, in the management now stated, was to excite his admiration of her art, and procure credit to what was to follow, by making Saul first believe, that, in a way supernatural, she had discovered who he was. In this she succeeded. Saul was satisfied that some ghost had betrayed him to her, and given her the information of his person ; and, desiring her not to be frightened, as he would be faithful to his oath just pledged, he wishes to know what apparition had spoken to her, or “ what she had seen.” Her answer is, “ I saw gods ascending out of the earth.” This is precisely in the style of pagan witches, whose pretended power was chiefly exercised over the infernal deities, and in bringing forth the ghosts from the lowest sepulchres. By this time Saul’s imagination is filled with the idea of Samuel’s appearance ; and though the woman spoke of a plurality, he understands her as meaning one principal personage, accompanied, perhaps, with his usual attendants ; he therefore asks, “ What form is he of ? ” She answers, “ An old man cometh up ; and he is covered with a mantle.” As this description exactly suited the well known habit of the Prophet, Saul, from this account of the witch, without any other evidence

(for it is not once intimated that he saw the apparition with his own eyes), “perceived that it was Samuel;” that is, this was the conclusion, or the belief which took place in his mind. Under this persuasion, he instantly prostrated himself on the ground before the pretended phantom.

At this stage of the process, the woman disappears in her own person; and through the remainder of the scene, by her art of ventriloquism, supports the character of Samuel, whom she had made Saul to believe to be now present, come up out of the ground. But before she could venture to make her ghost utter oracles, it was necessary to draw out of Saul the object of his inquiry. Accordingly she puts this interrogatory into the mouth of her pretended Samuel: “Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?” Are not these words precisely in the style of pagan witchcraft? Do they not explicitly recognise its powers to evoke the dead? Had the true Samuel been present, sent by God, as so many learned commentators have taught; would he have thus attributed his coming to Saul, or to the witch, at Saul’s instigation? Would he have thus complained of the disturbance given him, or of the force put upon his inclinations? For the words, “disquieted me,” in the original Hebrew, signify, “moved and disturbed by violence,” and are similar to the boast of the Thessalian witch in Lu-

can's Pharsalia, that she could *in actus invitos præbere deos*,—"constrain the unwilling gods." Would the true Samuel, sent by God, have appeared ignorant of the purpose of his mission, and humbly asked of Saul, why he had been sent for? On the contrary, would he not have opened upon the delinquent with a sharp rebuke of his recourse to a witch, and at once thundered in his ears the impending judgments of Heaven? But the artful woman assumes no more of the character of Samuel, than might be consistent with the reputation of her profession; and suffers not a word to escape him tending to its disparagement—no rebuke upon herself, nor upon Saul for applying to her.

The pretended Samuel having put Saul upon stating his case, it is thus described: "I am sore distressed, for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams; therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do." This information was amply sufficient to serve as a clue in directing the woman what response should be given by her feigned Samuel. Nothing could be more obvious and natural, than this reply: "Wherefore, then, dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?" What follows in the two next verses, is but a repetition of the things which all

Israel knew Samuel had long since said to Saul : “And the Lord hath done to thee, as he spake by me ; for the Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David : because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the Lord hath done this thing unto thee this day.” The witch knew that she was upon safe ground, while she thus confined her ghost to the very words before spoken by the Prophet.

The remainder of the response has, indeed, the air of prophecy ; but was, in fact, conjecture founded upon the highest probability. She knew that David, with his brave band of heroes, by whose aid Saul’s former victories had been generally obtained, was now in the camp of the Philistines ;—that their army, in other respects, was more numerous and powerful than it had ever been before ; while that of the Israelites was disheartened and in a state of dismay, partaking in the terrors of their king and commander. From these circumstances, she was led to conclude that the time was at hand when God would fulfil to David his promise of giving him the kingdom. In order to his accession to it, the death of Saul and his sons seemed necessary. She had heard Saul confessing that God had forsaken him. In this case, she well knew that his defeat and destruction were inevitable. These considerations might in-

spire her with the confidence to make her pretended Samuel add, "Moreover, the Lord will also deliver Israel, with thee, into the hand of the Philistines; and to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." Undoubtedly the death of him and his sons was the more willingly foretold, on account of his former persecution of the witches. The Hebrew word rendered, *to-morrow*, is indefinite and ambiguous; as it may mean the next day, or some future time. It is elsewhere rendered, "in time to come." Had Saul survived the approaching battle, this latitude with respect to the predicted time of his death, would have admitted of an interpretation consistent with the truth of the oracle.

Josephus praises the humanity of this woman, for her attention to Saul after he had swooned away at the hearing of her predictions. But it is observable, that what she now says by way of consoling the king under his trouble, is utterly inconsistent with every idea of Samuel's appearance having been by virtue of a divine mission; for she evidently and explicitly claims it to herself and her art. "Behold, thine handmaid hath obeyed thy voice, and I have put my life in my hand, and have hearkened unto thy words which thou spakest unto me"—that is, at the risk of my life, I have divined, and brought up Samuel, in compliance with thy request: "now, therefore,

I pray thee, hearken thou also unto the voice of thy handmaid." Had the sorceress been conscious that she had not put her arts in operation at all, and that the appearance of Samuel had been unexpected, and independent of her and her machinery,—after the whole was over, would she have dared thus to assume it to herself, and tell Saul to his face, that she had made Samuel appear, and had hazarded her life by thus obeying him? To me, this is a conclusive proof, inserted by the sacred writer on purpose to let us know that the whole narration upon this subject, contains nothing more than the fraudulent practices of a pretended witch, imposing upon a panic-stricken, half famished, credulous, and infatuated prince.

Our subject affords us demonstrative evidence that in the age of Saul, the immortality of the soul, or its continued existence after its separation from the body, was the generally received and popular belief of men. On it were founded all the arts of necromancy. The Gospel, however, has brought us more decisive proofs of this most interesting truth, and placed it beyond all reasonable doubt. Having obtained such assurance of the duration which awaits us hereafter, we shall be found without excuse, if the whole plan and conduct of our lives be not influenced and regulated by this belief.

PATRIOTISM.

PSALM CXXII.

THIS psalm is supposed to have been composed by David after he had settled the ark on mount Zion, and made Jerusalem the capital of his kingdom and the place for celebrating the public solemnities of the national religion. On his first accession to the throne, Jerusalem was in the possession of the Jebusites. From them he wrested it in the early part of his reign, and during the succeeding years of his increasing prosperity and greatness, it was exceedingly strengthened, adorned, and beautified. Within its walls was the fixed residence of the ark, and thither came up all the tribes three times a year, to attend the three grand festivals of their religion. There, too, were erected the tribunals of public justice, and thence proceeded the whole administration of the government. On seeing the people flocking from all quarters to this city of their public solemnities, Dr. Chandler supposes that David composed the excellent ode before us, “to express his satisfaction on so joyful an occasion, and the pleasing prospect he had of the city’s prosperity and the future happiness of the people.”

In the first verse, the psalmist expresses the pleasure with which he witnessed the general unanimity of the people, in assembling at the appointed season in this city for the worship of their God. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." It rejoiced my heart when I perceived this to be the general voice of the people, and that public opinion thus exhorted and quickened individuals to the common duty,—censuring and condemning that listlessness and indolence through which any are inclined to excuse their omissions. The subsequent verses depict the admiration, joy, and devotion of the people themselves on their first entering the city and beholding at once its glory and grandeur. "They are represented as crying out with triumph, in the height of their surprise and joy, when from the gate they behold the buildings which present themselves to their view; 'Jerusalem is built! It is a city compact within itself, stately, beautiful, and regular!' The description places us, as it were, under the very gate, and the houses and palaces rise almost conspicuous to our view. What added to their joy, when they beheld the city, was the presence of the ark in it, the courts of judicature, and the several other circumstances mentioned in the psalm." Jerusalem, the great seat and centre of religion and justice, was the centre of union to all the tribes; the palace, the centre of the city; and

the tabernacle, of the palace. “Blessed and happy,” says Dr. Delaney, “is that nation whose prince is the centre of union to his people; and God, that is, true religion, the common centre and cement both of people and prince.”

In the sixth and seventh verses we have a sudden, but natural and affecting transition from admiration to devotion,—breathing out ardent prayers for the peace and prosperity of a city, which so many considerations united to endear to its inhabitants, and render them solicitous for its safety: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. They shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.” It has been remarked that the original word here rendered, *peace*, “signifies pure, unmixed prosperity; undisturbed, and free from the corruption of any calamities.” The ode then closes with a solemn assurance from the author to his people, whom he styles his “brethren and friends,” that for their sakes, and the high reverence he bore to the house of God, he would himself both pray for the prosperity, and in the whole of his government, endeavour to secure the tranquillity and welfare of the city: “For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee!”

Whoever might have been the real author of this ode, it was undoubtedly composed for the use of the public assemblies of Israel when convened

in the place where God had recorded his name. In singing it, while they manifested their reverence for the institutions of religion, they cherished the love of their country and the social virtues in general.

From this psalm, rightly understood, we may learn two practical lessons,—the one, relating to our duty as men and citizens; and the other to our obligations as Christians, favoured with the knowledge and privileges of the true religion. The first has the name of *patriotism*, the love of our country, of the civil community of which we are born members. I know not whether there be in the whole Bible another passage where this virtue, in its true and genuine nature, is more clearly and strongly inculcated. The whole composition breathes the public spirit of its author, and shows how dear to his heart were the interest, peace, and prosperity of his native soil. To enjoy these in common with his brethren and fellow-citizens, was what he desired above all other worldly objects, and for which he daily prayed to God and exhorted all about him to pray. Such were his patriotic feelings, originating in one of the constituent principles in the human constitution. Self-preservation is the first and great law of our nature. The principle of self-love implanted in our bosoms prompts every man to obey this law in seeking his own safety and happiness. But he finds his per-

sonal happiness inseparably connected with that of his family, relations, friends, neighbours, in short, of the whole community subsisting under the same social compact, governed by the same laws and magistrates, whose several parts are variously connected one with another, and all united upon the basis of a common interest. The love of one's country, therefore, is the natural expansion of self love—a necessary consequence of the wise and rational love which a man owes to himself; since his own happiness is connected with that of his country. This love of our country is natural to all men. They feel an attachment to the soil, the climate, the spot of earth where they had their nativity, and to all the objects around it; and these natural ideas are associated with those moral conceptions which are derived from parents, kindred, and fellow-citizens, and the whole tends to give the utmost strength to that affection which we call the love of our country. Hence patriotism has, in all ages and by all nations, been deemed one of the noblest passions that can warm and animate the breast of man. Those individuals, therefore, who are destitute of this affection, who are capable of preferring foreigners to their own people, and the interests of a foreign government and community to those of their own, must be deemed insensible to the feelings of nature; a degenerate offspring; rebels at

once against the dictates of reason and the precepts of religion.

Such moral inconsistencies, however, sometimes appear. They are among the baneful effects of human depravity. In consequence of the corrupt prejudices, with which sin has filled the human heart, men frequently mistake their own happiness, embrace evil under the delusive appearance of good, love darkness rather than light, and choose that which virtually tends to their own ruin. Our liability to such self-deception and self-destruction, is the ground on which we are directed to seek the guidance of Him who made us, and his influence on our judgment, will, and affections. In praying to him for the peace and prosperity of our *Jerusalem*, that is, of our country, or of the community of which we are members,—we acknowledge our hearts and ways, our counsels and pursuits, to be in his hand, to be turned and changed at his pleasure; that he has an efficacious superintendency over all our affairs; is the source of all wisdom and might; through whose providence nations are prospered and increased, or wasted and destroyed; and that the destinies of all men, as societies and individuals, as public and as private characters, depend upon his giving or withholding that wisdom which is from above. To him therefore we should pray, that we and all our brethren of the community may be impressed with the true

love of our country ; may duly appreciate its privileges, civil and religious ; and that these may be handed down through successive ages in the line of our descendants, by their continuing to practise that righteousness which exalteth a nation.

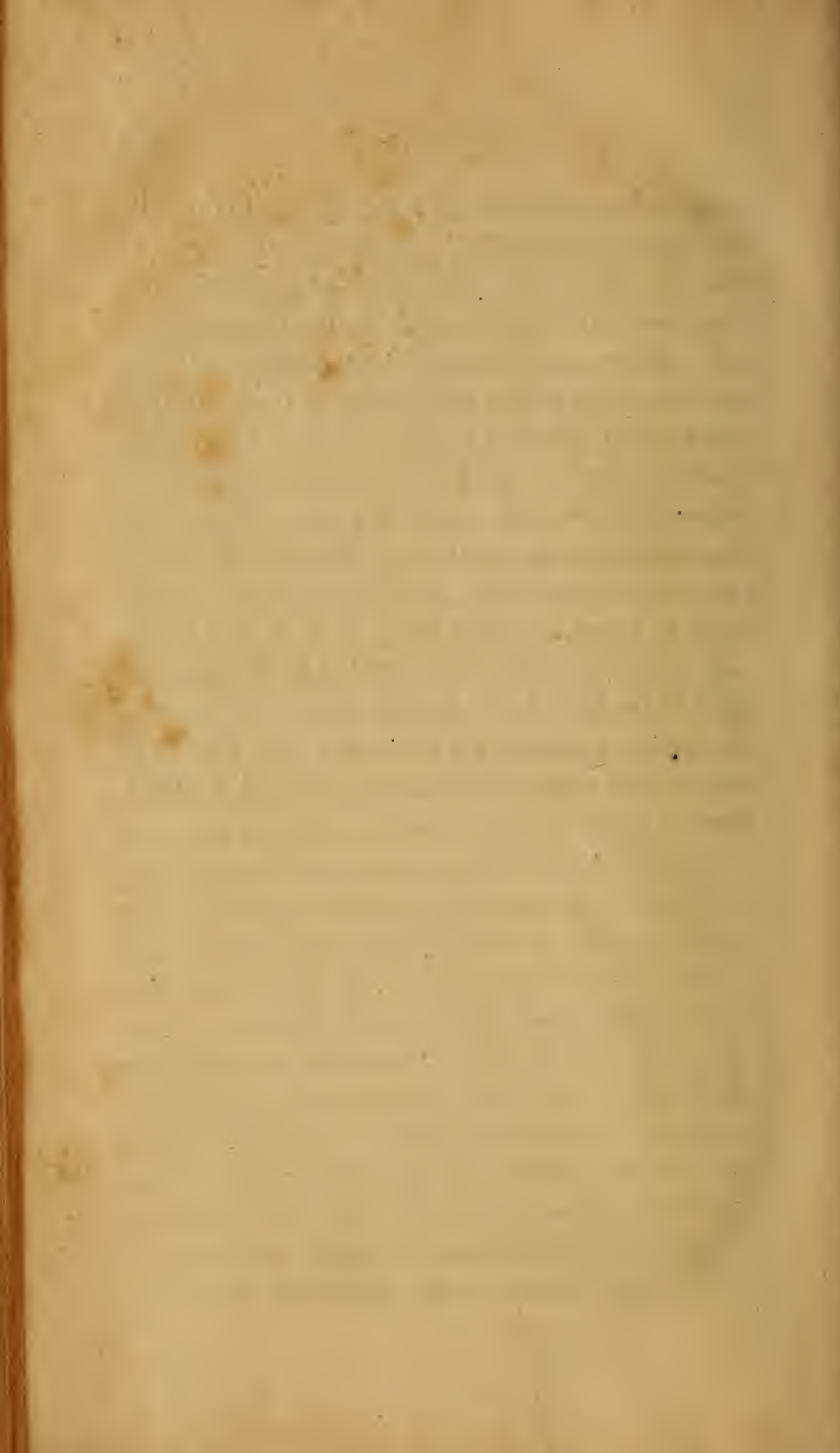
But besides this literal and civil import of the psalm, it is to be understood as having a spiritual and prophetic meaning. Israel according to the flesh, David their king, Canaan their country, and Jerusalem their royal capital city, were typical of the church of God, comprising all true believers or good men, from all quarters of the world through its whole duration ; headed by the Messiah, the son of David, their appointed king forever ;—the heavenly Canaan being their promised possession,—and the Jerusalem that is above, their capital royal city ; whose foundation, builder, and maker is God ; to which all the believing tribes are going up, and into which the whole general assembly will be collected, all and each of them transformed into a moral resemblance of their king, with whom they will be glorified forever. Were not these things the ultimate allusion of the psalm, we might doubt whether it were written under the influence of inspiration. Its dignity, as the word of God, consists in its carrying our thoughts forward to eternity and upward to heaven.

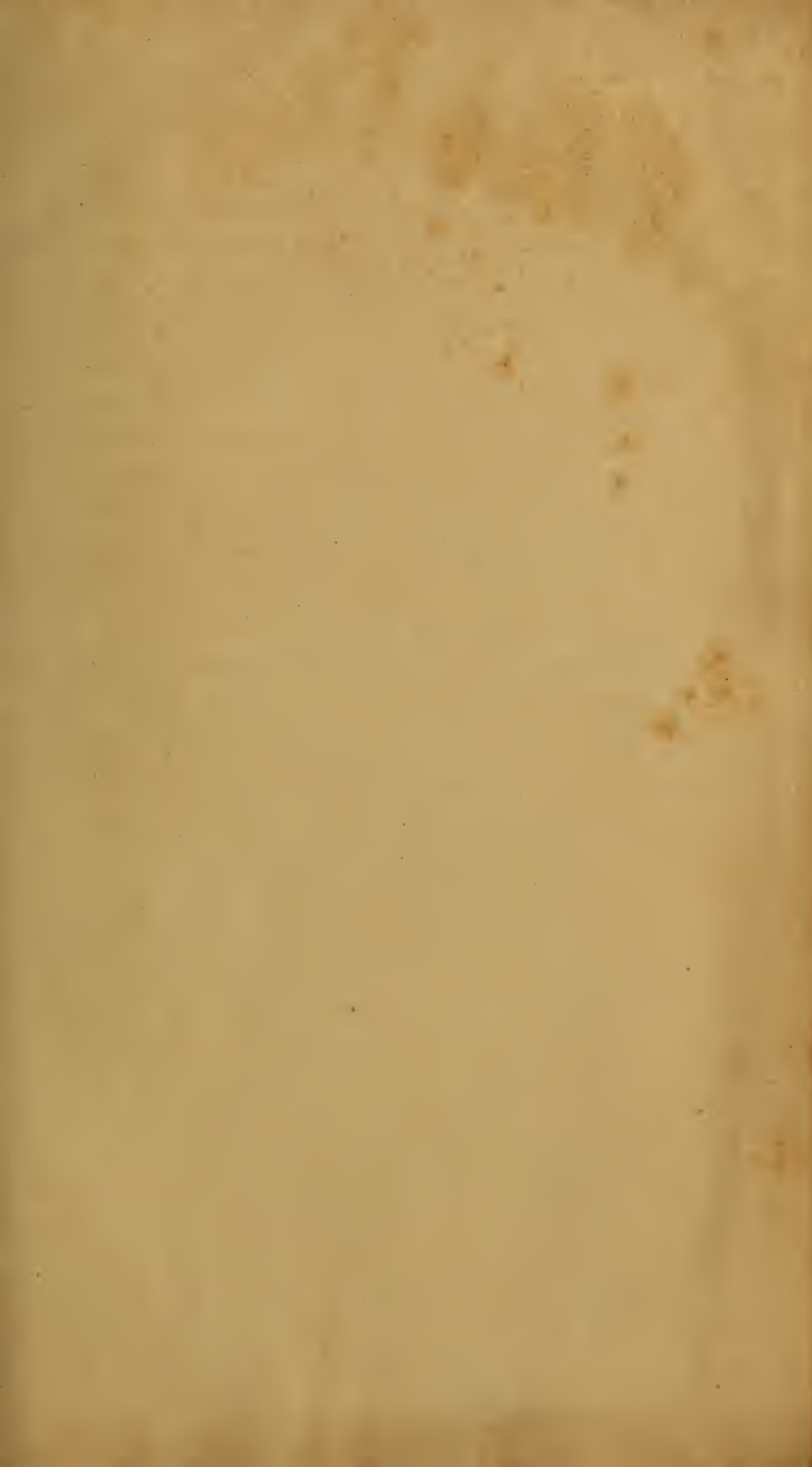
My brethren, if we be regular attendants on the ordinances of God's house and worship ; if we

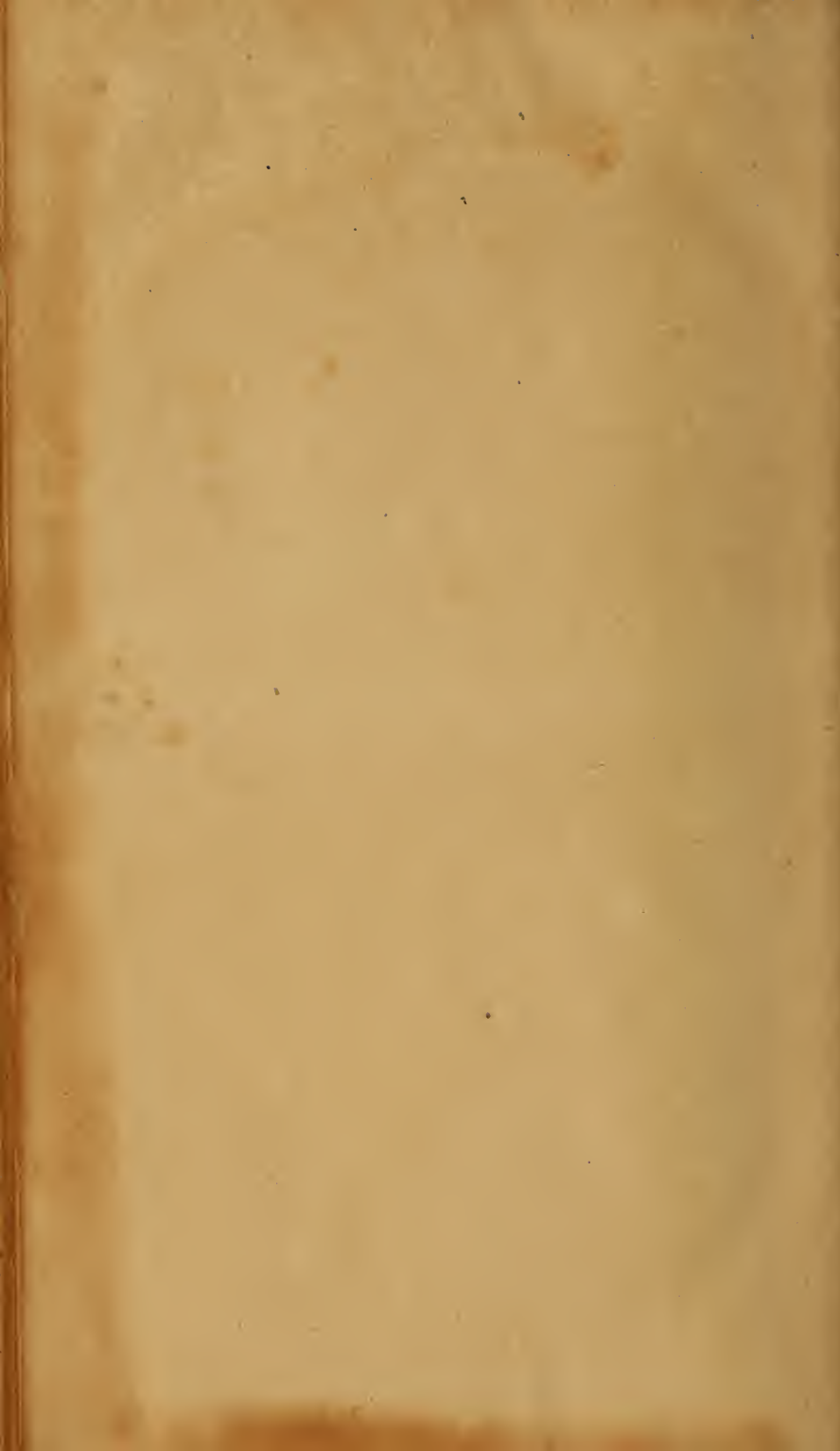
be conscious of pleasure and satisfaction, of joy and gladness resulting from such services, is it not because we view them as so many pledges of our future entrance into that house of God, which is not made with hands, eternal in the heavens? Are we not encouraged to endure the trials of our christian course, and quickened and animated in performing its duties, by the hope set before us, that our feet shall one day stand within the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem? O thou city of our God, builded and compact together, what glorious things have we heard spoken of thee! Thy gates are of pearl; thy streets of gold; the Lord God and the Lamb are thy temple in the midst of thee; their glory i thy light; thy people are the nations of the redeemed, washed and sanctified, and now clothed in white, with palms in their hands. They are all perfect before God, both in holiness and in happiness; their employment,—thanksgiving and praise; in their music they unite the song of Moses and the Lamb, and chant hallelujahs without end. Much more is reported of thy glory and felicity; but when our eyes shall see thee, we shall be forced to exclaim with the Queen of the south, “The half was not told us!” “They shall prosper that love thee.” Many of thy future citizens are still in this vale of tears, and though their faces are toward thee, yet during their pilgrimage here below, through this dreary wilderness, many weary steps await

them. On every side they are beset with difficulties, snares, and dangers. O thou divine Spirit of holiness, who didst reside without measure with Jesus our Saviour, descend into the bosoms of us who profess ourselves to be the members of his mystical body ; give us something of his inward peace and composure ; fill us with his heavenly temper ; enlighten our darkness ; dispel our doubts ; what we know not, teach thou us ; remove our errors and heresies ; heal our schisms and divisions ; cause all our strifes and contentions to cease ; bring us all to speak the same thing, to be of one mind, and to have no other solicitude but to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Thus may we become prepared for admission into that city, whose chief characteristics are peace and holiness forever !

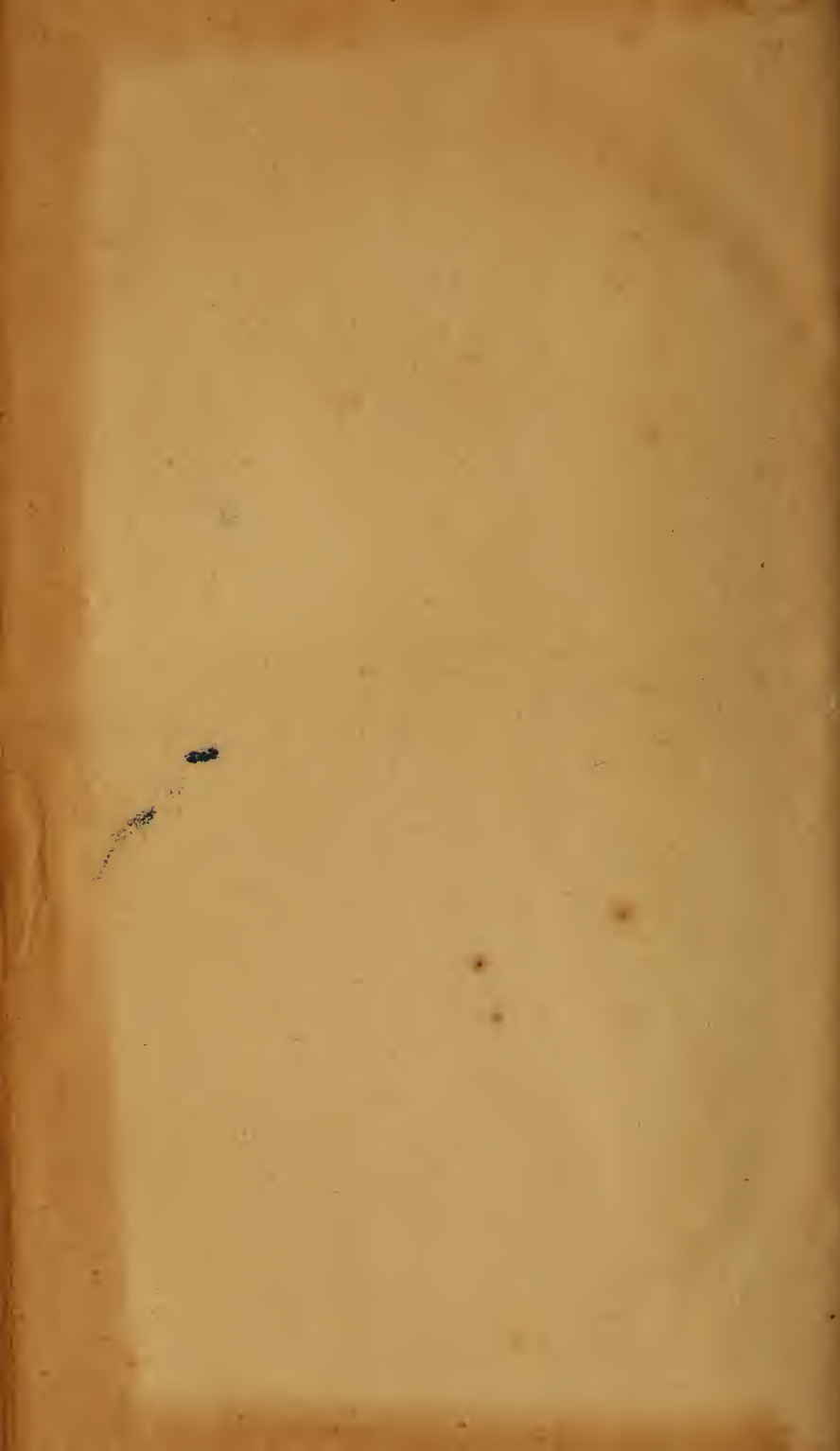
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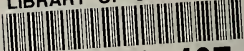




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