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DISCOURSES
 ON THE
 PROVIDENCE AND GOVERNMENT
 OF
 G O D.

BY THE LATE
 REV. NEWCOME CAPPE.

EDITED BY CATHARINE CAPPE.

“ And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia : for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”.....REV. xix. 6.

THE THIRD EDITION.

York :

Printed by Thomas Wilson and Sons, High-Ousegate,
 FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN, LONDON:
 AND FOR WILSON AND SONS, YORK.

1818.

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In exchange

Pacific Northwest School for the Maimed

Mar 19, 1927

ADDRESS

TO THE YOUTH OF THE RISING GENERATION,

WITHOUT REFERENCE TO SECT OR PARTY,

Prefixed to the second Edition, 1811.

BY THE EDITOR.

TO you who are entering on the most hazardous and important period of human life, the following Discourses are especially dedicated. They were written by one whose whole character was a faithful transcript of the principles they inculcate, and whose declining years of debility and languor, bore ample testimony to their truth and sublime energy.

You will not be offended, my young friends, that I address you as children of mortality—as being of yourselves, frail, and feeble, and dependant—for who by his own power can preserve himself in health or life; by his own energy reanimate the lifeless clay, or enter upon and choose his own future station amidst the unknown, awful, and never-ending

scenes which shall assuredly succeed? How important, then, that you should know assuredly whether you are the victims of a blind fatality, the sport of time and chance, or are safe and secure under the care and protection of him, “who alone liveth and reigneth,” with whom “one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day?”

To bring you to the better knowledge of this great Being, and to demonstrate his goodness and power, is the object of the following Discourses—an object, which, if the Editor mistakes not, the Writer has fully attained. Read and study them, she beseeches you, with seriousness and attention; endeavour to fix in your minds a deep and lasting impression of the great truths they contain; and should you be so happy as to imbibe their spirit, the spirit of pure and genuine devotion; you will possess a never-failing antidote against the degrading despicable vices of low sensuality; will be kept aloof from the vortex, not much less destructive, of fashionable levity and folly; will be preserved from a sordid selfish spirit; your minds will expand with the noblest views, your spirits will be cheered by the most reviving prospects, and your declining age, (if you attain to old age,) will be crowned with dignity and honour—tranquil and

happy in yourselves, you will spread and communicate tranquillity and happiness to all within your influence.

BUT there are other more peculiar considerations at this time and in this country which might be added to these general ones, to enforce upon the youthful mind the absolute necessity and extreme importance of early acquainting itself with the providence and government of God. For, were we now to inquire respecting the long established kingdoms of modern Europe, in the language of the Assyrian Ambassador to the pious Hezekiah, "Where is the King of Hamah and the King of Arphad, and the King of the city of Sephervaim, of Henah, and Ivah?"—Would the answer create no alarm?—Should we feel quite certain that our fortitude and our resignation may not soon stand in need of every support which the best principles and most approved virtue can supply? What would have been thought of him who should have ventured to predict a few years ago, the wonderful revolutions which have lately taken place? and who shall now presume to foresee where the desolating sword shall find its scabbard? Arm yourselves then, I entreat you, against the trying events which may already be fast approaching; and be early

convinced, that no armour is so secure as a holy and virtuous life, no consolation so all-powerful, as a well-grounded belief and firm confidence in the universal providence and government of God.

Your sincere well wisher and

Faithful friend,

THE EDITOR.



POSTSCRIPT TO THE THIRD EDITION,

December, 1817.

IF it appeared of peculiar moment in the year 1811 to point out the unspeakable importance of the doctrine developed in these Discourses on the government and providence of God, as the only real source of consolation to thousands and tens of thousands then groaning under the dreadful sufferings, and trembling under the heart-rending anxieties of the sanguinary conqueror, with what sentiments of ardent gratitude and humble thankfulness should you not now, my young friends, be exhorted to cherish in your hearts a lively and abiding sense of the same great truth in the year 1818. In 1812, the man-

date was issued, to the vanquished so merciful, to the cruel invader so awful—"Hitherto shalt thou go and no farther." Even the victor was compelled to confess, that "the seasons fought against him." But you will not rest here, but remembering who is the Lord of seasons, who it is that "ruleth the raging of the sea, and stilleth the waves when they arise," will rather say with the prophet, "This also proceedeth from Jehovah God of hosts: he sheweth himself wonderful in counsel, great in operation:"* "He reduces princes to nothing, and maketh the judges of the earth a mere inanity."†

We know indeed, in general, that when the judgments of God are upon the earth, the nations of the world will learn righteousness; but do we not likewise observe in all the dispensations of his providence, that these general ends are continually made at the same time subservient to many other important purposes, and this, not only in relation to particular states, but even of the various individuals that compose them; or rather, are we not then justified in concluding, that this may have been eminently the case in respect of some of the issues of the late

* Lowth's Isaiah, xxviii. 29.

† Ibid. xl. 23.

tremendous political tempest.* Perhaps it was indispensably necessary that the mighty Russian empire should apparently be shook to its very foundation, and that all the horrors inflicted and endured by a retreating apostate army, should be held in full display in the sight of astonished Europe, in order to prepare the hearts of worldly ambitious men for the reception of the gospel of peace. Do we know that any other train of events than those which did actually take place could so effectually have disposed the hearts of both prince and people, to expedite the translation of the Scriptures into so many different languages, and to have instantly co-operated with one heart and mind in aiding their universal diffusion?

Surely we may here, if ever, apply the language of our Saviour, adopted from the words of the Psalmist, and applied to the impending

* See the truly astonishing account of the awful circumstances under which the outline of a Bible Society was contemplated at Moscow, and which has since been carried into effect at Petersburg, and from thence throughout the most remote parts of the Russian empire, by the truly apostolic labours of a PATERSON, a PINKERTON, and a HENDERSON: names, which along with those of many others who have nobly devoted their lives to this great object, will doubtless be held in everlasting remembrance!—See Owen's History of the Rise and Progress of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

destruction of Jerusalem—"This is the Lord's
"doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

NOR is it less important to be able to look up to God as the sole arbiter of all events, in an hour of sorrow and dismay.—Since the above was written, my young friends, you have witnessed a most awful and impressive proof of the instability of all earthly greatness, in the unexpected death of a most amiable princess. You have seen that neither youth nor beauty, the most eminent attainments, or the highest rank, can ward off the fatal blow. What under so affecting a dispensation can pour the balm of consolation into the wounded spirit; what under such a calamity can wipe away a nation's tears, but a firm, well-founded practical belief in the universal government and providence of God? Foster, I beseech you, in your hearts an abiding sense of this most important truth:—In prosperity may it excite your warmest gratitude, and in adversity be your strong hold and rock of defence!—I cannot so well express my earnest wishes that it may in all seasons be productive of every virtuous exertion, of every sacred sentiment of reverent awe and humble filial love, as in the affectionate language of the Author of the following Discourses.

“ YOUNG man, while thy heart is tender ;
“ while it is not yet made callous either by
“ the vices and dissipations, or the interests
“ and cares of this world, cultivate the sacred
“ sentiments of piety ; give all diligence that
“ thy heart may delight itself in the law of
“ God, and that thy will may be totally,
“ universally, and cheerfully absorbed in
“ his.” *

C. C.

* See Discourse V.

ADVERTISEMENT,

BY THE EDITOR.

THE following Discourses, originally published in the life time of the Author, were not written by him with a view to publication, but in his ordinary course of preaching. They were transcribed from his dictating in the year 1795, and were published with his consent: but his health was at that time so extremely enfeebled, that they never could have the benefit of his own correction. Ushered into the world under circumstances so unfavourable, and wholly without patronage, it was not to be expected that they should immediately attract general attention, or be very widely circulated. They have, however, been duly appreciated by competent judges, have afforded great consolation to many an afflicted spirit, when all other consolations failed, and have passed through two large editions.

WHAT would have been the holy triumph of the Writer of them, could he have anticipated the cheering contrast between the gloom and darkness with which philosophy, falsely so called, (fostered by the ferocious partizans of the French revolution) had over-

spread the Christian horizon when they were first published, with that celestial light which the extensive circulation of those Scriptures in which he delighted has now diffused over half the globe? But if he were not permitted (and where is the child of mortality to whom it is permitted) to know “the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power,” yet did he fully enjoy the consolatory elevating hope, that the darkness would be but temporary. “Depend upon it,” he was wont to say, “these evils are merely passing clouds, from which the great truths of the gospel will emerge with redoubled splendour—the everlasting gospel is its name.”

May the excellent persons of every sect and party, in every quarter of the globe, who have so nobly emulated each other in efforts the most strenuous, to aid the translation, and to promote the universal diffusion of the sacred Oracles, thereby contribute to hasten the happy period we are encouraged to expect, when “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall there be war any more.” Still triumphantly proceed, with equal ardour, integrity, and success, conquering and to conquer; not with the poisoned arrows of pride, ambition, and vain-glory, but with the sacred sword of the spirit—meekness, righteousness, and peace!

C. C.

A SHORT ANALYSIS

OF THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSES,

DESIGNED TO SERVE THE PURPOSES EITHER OF A TABLE
OF CONTENTS, OR OF AN INDEX.

BY THE EDITOR.

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DISCOURSES, &c.

DISCOURSE FIRST.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS,
WHEN THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT?*

THE prophet's question admits of a very easy answer, and comprehends in it a very strenuous affirmation of the universal agency, and uncontrollable providence, of God. "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?" None, either in heaven above, or on earth beneath, unless there is a being derived, but not dependant; or a power superior to the Supreme.

ALL the extraordinary events of life, those which surpass the known powers of their apparent causes, we ascribe without hesitation unto God; it is only in its ordinary occurrences, in the constant tenour of its affairs,

that we are unmindful of the divine government; and even here, if at any time we think of it, we are forward enough to profess our faith in so plain and important a doctrine: in words we acknowledge it; it is only in works, that we deny it. If a man by his words should remove mountains, or still the raging of the waters; if he should recall the dead to life, and the dead should obey his voice; if he should foretel futurities so dark and distant as to elude the force of all human penetration, and the futurity should precisely answer to his predictions; we should conclude, without even a suspicion, that God was with him; and we should ascribe these effects to that man, only as the instrument, and to the great Maker of the universe, as the cause. In the eye of sober consideration, the constant current of events does as really proceed from God; and the human understanding can trace up the stream to him, who is the sole fountain of life, of power, and of being. There is equal reason, why we should acknowledge God in the one, as in the other; and we are under the same obligations to observe, and to receive, and to improve both, with reverence and godly fear.

YET because the one is familiar to us, and the other wonderful, they are received by us

with very different regards ; we stand in awe of those events, that come to pass but once in a course of ages, and acknowledge them to be divine ; we overlook the miracles that God is working in us, and around us, every day. Whatever is common, we say, is natural : often we hardly know what we mean when we say so. We receive the ordinary occurrences of life, with such sentiments, as if they were truly the result of chance, or the effects of an unintelligent fatality, and speak of them in such terms, as sufficiently indicate, that the divine agency and providence enter not into our common notions of them ; otherwise our anxieties would be composed, our anger would be abashed, our exultation mitigated, our discontent corrected, and our grief restrained. We should habitually maintain a more steady and becoming temper ; we should be more justly and piously affected by every incident if we were habitually mindful who it is, that changeth the times and seasons ; who it is that “ formeth light and createth darkness,” that “ killeth and maketh alive,” and appointeth unto every man both his portion and his work.

THE connexion of our text, particularly the relation it bears to what has gone before it, is difficult to be ascertained ; and therefore it is

dubious, whether the doctrine implied in the question is here to be understood in its whole extent, as relating to all the operations of God, both natural and supernatural, or only in a limited acceptation, as referring to some extraordinary agency of God. The latter appears to me to be the truth; yet not so indisputably, but that much may be urged in favour of the former. I shall briefly show you how the matter stands upon each of these principles.

NOT foretelling future evils, but bewailing, as I apprehend, the present calamities of himself, and of his country, the prophet, having pathetically described their deep afflictions, passes on to those thoughts of consolation, which, in the midst of so much sorrow, were needful to preserve them from despair.* He calls to mind, that the stroke of Providence is lighter than their sins; that yet, in the midst of judgment, God remembers mercy; they had chosen him for their portion, and therefore might hope in his pity; that the Lord is good to those who dutifully seek his

* In order to enter completely into the deep distress of the afflicted prophet, we should bear in mind the dreadful sufferings he had personally undergone, (Jer. xxxviii. 6.) the total destruction of the city and temple, and the subsequent captivity of the people in Babylon. EDITOR.

favour, and patiently wait for it; that afflictions are kind in their intention, and profitable in their effects; that the chastisements of the Lord are not boundless, though his compassions are; and that he does not willingly afflict, or grieve the children of men.

PERPLEXITY is natural to excess of grief: these thoughts of comfort, while the prophet is pursuing them, become themselves, for a moment at least, the means of interrupting his comfort, and of renewing his distress. His consolation proceeded from the providence of God; and yet, in the end, the sorrows, which hereby he seeks to sooth, do themselves rise up into an objection against that consolatory doctrine. To crush under foot all the prisoners of the earth; to lead his people captive, and to tread these captives under foot; to turn away the right of a man before the face of the Most High; in the courts of judicature, and under the colour of justice, to pervert judgment, and sanctify oppression; to subvert a man in his cause, by fraud, or perjury, or false witness, or by any other means to undermine the foundations of right and property, the Lord approveth not; literally, and more justly, the Lord seeth not; the Lord looketh not on these instances of iniquity. For, can it be supposed that he

observes what passes upon earth, and yet, holy as he is, permits it to be defiled with such wickedness? Can it be supposed that he interests himself in the affairs of men, and yet, compassionate as he is, permits such cruelties to triumph? Has he any pleasure in the calamities, has he any complacency in the iniquities of his creatures? Does he rule the world for no other purpose, but to make the sins of one half a plague to the other half of its inhabitants? How shall these difficulties be solved? How fair a presumption do they afford, that the Lord knoweth not, or regardeth not, what passeth upon earth?

FAITH, founded upon just principles, though for a moment it may fail; though the suspicions that arise from within, or the cavils that are objected to it from without, may cause it for a little while to stagger, yet will speedily recover itself, or be restored by him, "who raiseth up those that be bowed down." And thus you see, whether these difficulties in the divine dispensations were, for the time, the real thoughts of his own heart, or whether you consider the prophet as stating the objection, that he might answer it for the service of his countrymen; he instantly returns to a more dutiful and pious strain, and dwells upon those considerations, which must be satisfac-

tory to his own soul, and convincing to his brethren.

No argument can be drawn from the present calamities of their country against the providence of God; for, in our text he proceeds, and with an air of triumph and indignation, against thoughts so unworthy of the divine character and perfections, he asks, “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?” “Thinkest thou, my heart, or say ye, my countrymen, that God does not know or regard the affairs of men? Ye bewail your situation as forlorn and desperate, overlooked and abandoned by the great Lord of all. Do you think, that these things happen without his notice, or appointment?” “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?” That is, “On what principle can ye account for the predictions, that were from time to time imparted to you, concerning the calamities under which ye now labour, wherein they were so clearly, and so perfectly described? If God did not dictate the prediction, if God did not give it its accomplishment, whence was it, that, at the distance of so many years, the events should so exactly correspond unto the prophecy? What am I? Have I saga-

‘ city to foresee what is to come? Have I
 ‘ power to make good what I rashly uttered?
 ‘ Was it by my own penetration that I dived
 ‘ into the secrets of futurity? Was it by my
 ‘ own foreknowledge that I warned you of a
 ‘ storm, which, as yet, was not even gathering
 ‘ in Chaldea?* Whence was it that the reveries
 ‘ of my vain imagination should be so com-
 ‘ pletely realized? or what efficacy could the
 ‘ presumptuous effusions of my folly have to
 ‘ bring upon you so precisely the calamities,
 ‘ with which, in the name of God, I threaten-
 ‘ ed you? Had not God revealed them to me,
 ‘ what could I have known of the things that
 ‘ should be hereafter? Had not God inspired
 ‘ me, what durst I have said of the future de-
 ‘ solations of my country? Had not God com-
 ‘ manded it, these things had never come to
 ‘ pass: the events would have falsified my
 ‘ words, and exposed me at once to your in-
 ‘ dignation, and to death. Doubt now, if
 ‘ you can, whether this distress is come upon
 ‘ you without the knowledge and appoint-
 ‘ ment of the Lord. Doubt now, if you can,
 ‘ whether he observes, or interests himself in
 ‘ the affairs of men: and think, whether it be
 ‘ not some consolation of our sorrows, that

* Jer. vii. viii. ix.

‘ they are not without the privity and permission of our God. He knows them, for he foretold them ; the events have answered to his predictions ; the events, therefore, were at least under his dominion and control.’

SUCH seems to me to be the sense of our text ; such the relation that it bears to the passage where we find it ; and such the manner in which it may, with most justice and propriety, be illustrated.

IT may, however, be considered, as we observed to you, in another view, corresponding well enough with its connexion ; it may be considered as having no particular reference to any supernatural operations of God, either in the revelation of future events, or in the accomplishment of those predicted ; but, as containing in it a general affirmation of his universal agency and dominion ; as an assertion that nothing comes to pass through the will of man, unless the will of God concur with it. In this view, remembering that the prophet has been bewailing the calamities of Jerusalem, and afterwards taking comfort from the consideration of God’s providence and mercy ; we must also call to mind, that it occurred to him as a difficulty, or is represented by him as the objection of another to this reviving doctrine, that the wickedness

of some should be the cause of so much misery to others: a consideration, which, as it is intimated, seemed to invite to this conclusion, that the Lord seeth not, or regardeth not the affairs of men.

To this the prophet answers in the words of our text: “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?” “Who is he that can frustrate the will of God; or accomplish his own purposes, in opposition to the divine? Who is he that can make good any thing that his lips have uttered, or his heart conceived, if he derive not both the permission and the power from God? If God has commanded otherwise, in vain will he attempt to fulfil his word, or effectuate his thoughts. If God has not commanded that they should be accomplished, accomplished they never will be. No man but himself shall be the better for them, if they be good; none but himself the worse for them, if they be evil. God is the original fountain of being, and of power; and he also is the perpetual supporter of it. Derived from him at first, the efficacy of every other cause, the ability of every other agent, the existence of every creature, are continually dependant on his pleasure; they act but as he furnishes them

' with the opportunity, and the power of
 ' action; and they live from one moment to
 ' another, but as he supplies the means of
 ' life. Can any of you boast an independent
 ' being, and by his own will prolong his life
 ' until the morrow? Why then do you ever
 ' die? Can any of you, by his own will, by
 ' all his prudence, joined with all his reso-
 ' lution, protract his health until the evening?
 ' Why then do you ever languish? Can any
 ' of you, when he undertaketh an enterprise,
 ' by the effect of his own most forcible
 ' volition, by his steadiest determination
 ' joined to his acutest skill, ensure success
 ' unto himself? Why then are you ever dis-
 ' appointed?—It is because the concurrence
 ' of God is necessary to accomplish your de-
 ' terminations, and to give efficacy to your
 ' volitions, that you say, and it cometh not to
 ' pass, because the Lord commandeth it not.
 ' The divine permission and concurrence are
 ' necessary unto every change that takes
 ' place among his creatures: conclude not
 ' then, my countrymen; suspect not then,
 ' my soul, that because we are led captive;
 ' and trodden under foot; that because justice
 ' is perverted in our cause, and we are sup-
 ' planted in our rights; conclude not hence,
 ' that God sees not, and regards not what

‘ passes upon earth. Chaldea had never
 ‘ triumphed, if God had not given her the
 ‘ power; and however the Babylonish mon-
 ‘ arch may boast of his omnipotence, not
 ‘ all his armies could have led captive one
 ‘ single Jew, if the Lord had not commanded
 ‘ it. It is the Lord’s doing; as such, let us
 ‘ humbly, piously, and penitentially acknow-
 ‘ ledge it. Our afflictions, as well as our
 ‘ blessings, come from God: whatever be the
 ‘ means and instruments, the cause and author
 ‘ of them is in heaven. As he ordains and
 ‘ speaks, what we call good, or evil, followeth.
 ‘ In the severest trials, he leaves us far more
 ‘ than we have merited. In his highest dis-
 ‘ pleasure, we are not without the means of
 ‘ reconciliation: in his hottest indignation,
 ‘ we are not without hope in his mercy. Let
 ‘ us take then, the counsels of his providence,
 ‘ and embrace the consolations it affords; for
 ‘ “ Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass,
 ‘ “ when the Lord commandeth it not ?” ’

DISCOURSE SECOND.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS,
WHEN THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT ?*

FOR the better improvement of this subject, we might now proceed to confirm the doctrine of the text, by considering in general, what reason teaches, and what Scripture superadds unto her teachings, concerning the providence and government of God: and hence we might pass on to inquire, what influence such a doctrine ought to have upon the temper of our hearts, and the conduct of our lives. But these are topics, which it is my intention to discuss more at large, in some future discourses on this text; at present I shall confine myself to the following reflections.

1. FROM what you have already heard, we are naturally led to observe, that to foreknow, and to foretel futurities, is a proper and peculiar characteristic of divinity.

It is the prerogative of God. It is as much beyond the power of an uninspired mortal to discover, as it is beside his duty, curiously to pry into, what shall be hereafter. The knowledge of futurity must proceed from one of the following principles, or both: it must arise from a clear and complete survey of all the causes which are at present subsisting in the universe; from the perfect knowledge of their strength and efficacy; and an infallible discernment of the effects that will result from their combination or opposition; or, it must have for its foundation the power of controlling all causes, and regulating all events; and a steady determination, that, at any rate, and by any means, natural, if it may be, or supernatural, if that be necessary, the event foretold shall be brought to pass according to the circumstances of the prediction. Without one, or both of these pre-requisites, there can be no foreknowledge; and without prescience, there is no prophecy. But in whom can such perfection dwell except in him to whom all excellency belongeth? Who can comprehend the universe, or understand its tendencies but he who gave it its immeasurable extent, and blended in it so many various principles? Or who can engage for any distant issue, but he, who having all the powers of nature in his

hands, can direct, impel, restrain, suspend, and counteract them, as he pleaseth? “Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?”

IT is with the most perfect propriety, therefore, that the Scriptures always represent this, as a peculiar attribute of God; and describe the great Ruler of the world, as he “who alone declareth the former things, and showeth the things that must be hereafter; who pronounceth the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done: who revealeth secret things, and maketh known what shall be in the latter days.”

IT is with the greatest justice that they represent the one living and true God, as challenging those vanities, which the Gentiles called gods, to produce this proof of their divinity. “Let them bring forth, saith the Lord, and show us what shall happen; let them show the former things what they be, and declare to us things to come; let them show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that they are Gods.”—Prophecy, therefore, is the gift of God; and prescience, a characteristic of divinity: a doctrine of the greatest importance, and which is clearly contained in the words of our text,

whether interpreted in its more limited, or in its more extensive acceptation. “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?” Hence it follows,

2. THAT every prophet is entitled to the honour and obedience of those among whom he prophecies; and that every religion supported by prophecy, is divine.

WHAT is a prophet? The oracle of God. And every thing that pretends, (if the pretension be not manifestly absurd,) to come from God, commands our attention and inquiry. Every thing that does really come from God calls forth our profoundest reverence and most absolute submission. If God speaketh to us, it becometh us, it behoveth us, to hear. To whom do we owe a more serious regard, than to him who endued us with the power of attention? Or from whom can we expect more important communications, than from him, whose we are; who has our fate in his hands, and who created us, that we might be happy? * If he give us information, it is that we may be guided by his light: if he offer us comfort, it is that we may be refreshed by his consola-

* Hence the singular efficacy of those scriptures which evidently bear upon them the sacred impress of divine authority, to reform the conduct, and to purify the heart. EDITOR.

tions: if he lay his commands upon us, it is that we may do his will. In these services, whatever instruments he employs, however mean their talents and obscure their circumstances, they become respectable by the employment: that God honours them as his ministers and messengers, lays a sufficient claim to our honour and esteem. They have but to produce the evidence of their divine commission, or of the divine presence with them, and they have perfectly demonstrated our obligation to believe them, and obey them.

BUT, as no miracle performed, or prophecy fulfilled, if any such could appear in his behalf, can support his authority, whose doctrine is immoral or absurd; so no reasonableness, no excellence of doctrine, can be admitted as a conclusive argument of divine inspiration and authority, unless its pretensions be attested by miracles performed, or prophecies fulfilled. Do you say of any doctrine, that it is reasonable and excellent? I am ready to admit this to be a fair presumption that it may be dictated by heaven; so far as I discern that reasonableness, and that excellence, I shall apply the doctrine, and esteem the teacher; beyond this I cannot go; beyond this I dare not trust myself. I may follow God implicitly. If I know that it is

he who leads me, I may proceed with confidence in the way, though I see not whither I am going.

IF to the general reasonableness and excellence of the doctrine, you superadd the evidence of miracles, or appeal to the accomplishment of prophecies, for the establishment of your authority, this removes whatever doubt or difficulty may have arisen in my mind; thenceforth I regard you, not merely as a wise man, but as a prophet; and reverence your doctrine and injunctions, not as your own word, but as the word of God who sent you. Utter a prediction, and I will wait for its accomplishment; and, "if you say, and "it cometh to pass," I shall conclude, that the Lord commanded you to prophecy, and shall receive the doctrine, in confirmation of which you appeal to your prophetic spirit, with the full assurance of faith. Work a miracle, and I will believe whatever predictions you shall utter; and rely on the event with the most perfect confidence.

WITH respect to Jewish prophets, there was a peculiar circumstance that gave them some little credibility and authority, antecedent to any miracle they wrought in pledge of their predictions, or to the fulfilment of any prophecy, in proof of their divine commission.

It is expressly written in the law, “ The prophet who shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, even that prophet shall die.” And that there might remain no doubt among his judges, whether any man had become obnoxious to this sentence, the word which God commanded not to speak, is immediately explained; and such a criterion given them, to distinguish between the prophet of the Lord, and the false prophet, as could not be mistaken. “ And if thou say in thy heart,” adds the law, “ how shall we know the word that the Lord hath spoken? When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously, thou shalt not be afraid of him;” * i. e. thou shalt not fear his threatenings, or by any thing that he shall denounce upon thee, be deterred from executing on him the sentence of the law.

WHEN we consider the large share that prophecy was to have in the Jewish dispensation, and the intimate connexion it was to hold with their civil, as well as with their spiritual interests; when we consider what temptations would arise to invite the delusions of the am-

* Deut. xviii. 20, 21, 22.

ditious and unprincipled, and to encourage the workings of enthusiasm in the vain and ignorant, we must see the equity, and admire the wisdom of this law, which so powerfully tended to preserve the people from the seduction of false pretenders, and to enforce their regards to those prophets who addressed them by the command of God ; for surely nothing could be more effectual to repress every declaration concerning what was to come which it was in the power of man to repress. When he knew that he must answer with his life for the event, whatever a man might think, he would be cautious how he spake ; and it might probably be concluded, that whatever prophecy was in these circumstances uttered, was uttered because it could not be withheld ; because it was forced from the prophet, by the irresistible impulse of the inspiring God.

BUT whatever authority Jewish prophets might derive, and some they would naturally and reasonably derive from this circumstance ; under any other dispensation, no man can warrantably demand credit to his predictions, or assume authority on the pretence of inspiration, till he can produce some certain miracle for his voucher, or appeal to the fulfilment of some prophecy, as the seal of his divine commission. If he only bears witness

of himself, his witness is not true; all his pretensions to inspiration, if they be not pitiable, are detestable; if he believes them himself, he is frantic; if he believes them not, he is wicked; for they must be either the visions of a wild imagination, or the impositions of hypocrisy, impudence, and fraud. If his vain babblings were the suggestions of the spirit of God, why does he not produce his credentials? He has no prophecies to support him, these are the signatures, and they are the only credible signatures of divine authority: wherever they are wanting, (and wanting to such they will ever be,) no doctrine, no declaration, no precept, no institution of religion, ought to have any authority or credit, but so far only as they concur with the gospel of Christ. This is the word of God, divinely authorized and attested. It began to be spoken by the Lord himself, upon whom the spirit of God descended at his baptism, was confirmed by them that heard him, God himself bearing witness with signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the holy spirit. Prophecy is the gift of God, for prescience is the characteristic of the godhead; wherever there is prescience, there is God. And, whatever can appeal to prophecy, to declare its origin and its author, challenges our faith, and gives

us perfect security in believing ; for it is clearly and incontestibly divine.

ON these principles we may receive the Gospel safely ; we cannot safely neglect it ; we are under every obligation which the attestation and command of God can lay upon us, both to receive and honour it. It is itself the accomplishment of numerous prophecies that began in the early ages of the world, and preceded its publication through a long succession of ages, at least more than two thousand years. Its author was eminently possessed of the prophetic spirit ; he foretold his death, and the manner of his death.— Though it was not improbable that he should be put to death, yet the circumstances of his death were, in many respects, exceedingly improbable ; yet improbable as they were, as he said, so it came to pass : he foretold his resurrection from the dead ; and, at the time he specified, he rose : he foretold his ascension to the Father, and he was visibly taken up towards heaven : he foretold the descent of the holy spirit, and the holy spirit, according to his promise, took possession of his disciples : he foretold many other great events that literally corresponded to his prophecies.

THE prophetic spirit passed from him to his disciples. The rapid progress, the vast

extent, the cruel persecution, the dreadful corruption of his Gospel, had all been foretold either by the Master or his followers; and the event exactly verified their words. The present circumstances of that people among whom he fulfilled his ministry, and to whom he foretold their doom, scattered among all nations, yet from all nations distinct and separate, are, at this day, a living demonstration, that as he received of the Father, so Jesus spake; and a faithful pledge, that “though the heavens and the earth should pass away, his words shall not pass away until all be fulfilled.” *

BELIEVING, therefore, the terrors of the Lord, let us flee from the wrath that is to come; and seeing that there are given unto us, through Jesus Christ, promises so exceedingly great and precious, so immutably sure and certain, let us cleanse ourselves from all pollution both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God. Since the Gospel is so worthy of all acceptation, let us hold fast the profession of our faith without waver-

* See a very striking outline of the state of the Jews, compiled from the most authentic records of that extraordinary people, from the period of their return from the Babylonian captivity, to the 19th century, by Hannah Adams. Boston, Massachusetts, 1812. EDITOR.

ing; and if any man ask a reason of the hope that is in us, let us show him how all these things, that are the objects of our faith, were spoken of from ancient times, and in the fullness of time accomplished, and then let us ask him, in the words of our text, "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?" Steadfast in the faith, let this be the invariable principle of our conduct: "the life that we now live in the flesh, let it be by the faith of the Son of God." To confess with our tongues unto the Lord, while in our temper and our practice we deny him, will avail little to promote his honour among men, and less to promote our interest with God. Faith, if it do not sanctify, cannot save; if our characters be not the better for it while we live, our fate will be the worse for it when we die. It is one article of our faith, that if we die in our sins, we perish; it is another, that if we repent, we shall be forgiven; it is another, that without holiness no man can see God; it is another, that God will not leave or forsake those who forsake not him; it is another, that they who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, shall obtain eternal life.

MAY these sacred truths be deeply engraven on our minds, and may our hearts be for ever

open to their blessed influences. Let us resign all our souls to Christ, and to his Gospel; let us, according to our respective characters, faithfully apply his salutary maxims. Let the wicked be warned by its prophetic admonition; let the penitent be revived by the consolations that it offers him; let the weak be encouraged by the power of him they serve; let the confirmed Christian rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Let us prize these sacred oracles according to the value of the gift and the dignity of the giver. Let us improve them according to the greatness of the talent, and the strictness of our account. As we wish that in death they may furnish us with those lively hopes that shall be the steady anchor of our souls, let us steer our course through life by their counsel and direction. As we are to be tried by them, let us walk by them. As our faith must be proved by their doctrine, let this be the standard to regulate our belief. As our characters must be examined by their laws, let these be the standard to regulate our manners. If we wish to be sanctified, let us seek our sanctification through the truth of God. If we hope to be saved, let us work out our salvation in the way, and by the means that he hath appointed. Let us cherish a lively faith, and cultivate a growing knowledge in

those Scriptures in which we think we have eternal life. Let us hide them in our hearts, and pray to God to impress them there, that we may not sin against him. Since we profess ourselves believers, and have so much reason to justify our faith; since we profess ourselves to be interested in the honour of the Gospel, and have so much reason to justify our concern for its reputation and success, let us labour that the word of Christ, like a fountain of living water, “may dwell richly in us “in all wisdom,” and flow liberally from us in all holy conversation and godliness.

DISCOURSE THIRD.



LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS, WHEN
THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT?*

THE doctrine comprehended in these words, is the universal agency and providence of God. Whatever interpretation be given to our text, this doctrine necessarily results from it. If you consider the prophet as saying, 'Who is he that saith, that promises, that commands, that undertakes, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth not?' This is equivalent to a direct assertion of God's agency and providence. If you consider these words as restrained by their connexion to prophetic inspiration, and conceive the sense of them to be, 'Who is he that is able to fore-tel what the event shall verify, when the Lord commandeth it not?' this is equivalent to a direct assertion, that no man can pro-

phesy but by divine inspiration, which evidently contains in it another assertion, viz. that futurity is known to God ; that he can answer for the arrival of whatever event he pleaseth, and by consequence, since the future is dependent on the present, that the present at all times passeth under his notice, and is subject to his control. Unless it be given him in command from God, no man can speak truly of futurity; and if any man has spoken truly of futurity, it was because God commanded the events to concur with his predictions.— Thus in any view, you see, our text asserts the providence and government of God.

IN discoursing upon this subject, we shall endeavour,

1. To give you some idea of this government with respect both to its nature and extent ; i. e. to explain to you what we mean by the government of God.

2. WE shall mention to you some of the reasons by which this doctrine is supported ; and having established the fact, we shall proceed,

3. To inquire what influence it ought to have upon our temper and our conduct.

To return. Whatever difficulties may attend the application of the doctrine of the

government of God in particular instances, or whatever doubts or perplexities may arise on some incidental questions that are connected with this subject, the general notion of a divine providence is very clear in the conception, and very certain in its evidence.

By the providence of God we understand the care he exercises over all his creatures to preserve them in being so long as he thinks fit, and to supply them during that term, with all things necessary to their preservation; to put a period to their existence when it seemeth to him good, and, to this end, to order and direct the means of their dissolution; to fix, to multiply, or diminish their number, according to his will; to appoint, to continue, and to change their circumstances, according to his pleasure.

WHEN we assert the divine providence, we deny on the one hand, that any thing comes to pass by chance or accident; i. e. without the knowledge, or beside the purpose of God; we deny on the other hand, that any thing takes place, through I know not what fatality, whether it be contrary to the divine will, and uncontrollable by his power; or whether, being agreeable to his pleasure, it be the effect of a necessity that proceeds not from his determination. We deny that the world

is abandoned without order, rule, or end; we affirm, that whatever be at any time its order, it is precisely what God wills it should be; and that whatever be its end, the divine pleasure will therein be perfectly accomplished; that all things harmoniously conspire and work together, to fulfil his purpose; and that, in the mean time, every intermediate operation and effect follows his direction, and executes his design. We deny that the world is like a ship, whose rudder is broken, and its pilot drowned, moving but at random, and changing its situation, but without design; we affirm, that the divine intelligence regulateth all the motions of the universe, and that, by all its motions, the divine purposes are promoted. We deny, that the world is like a state, whose Ruler has abdicated the kingdom, and left the jarring passions, and capricious humours of his subjects, without guidance or restraint; we affirm, that the world never is, or can be, in anarchy or confusion; that no will of man, or any other being, can defeat the will of God; that their aims can prevail no farther than as they concur with his designs; and that, voluntarily to their honour, if they be good, they do his pleasure; that against their will to their shame, if they be wicked, they carry on his schemes.

SUCH is the government of God, extending to all inanimate, animate, sensible, intelligent and moral beings; not to destroy their respective natures, but to leave them in full possession of their properties, and not suspending, overbearing, or counteracting their respective powers, but guiding, managing, and employing them in his service: so proportioning their degrees of strength, of vigour, regulating their mutual influences and relations, and restraining or enlarging their effects and consequences, as to make them all the ministers of his pleasure, the executors of his counsels, the instruments of accomplishing the ends of his creation; which, if he be himself perfectly good, and independently happy, must be to make all who are capable of goodness, good; and all who are capable of happiness, happy.

To this general idea of the Divine Providence, in order farther to explain the nature and extent of God's government, I would subjoin the following observations, viz.

1. THAT what we call evil, as well as good, i. e. the various modes of pain, as well as of pleasure, proceed from God: it is the Lord's doing; the result of his will or appointment.

IT is not one being that pours out blessings on the world, and another that mingles evils

with those blessings: both proceed from the same fountain, and flow together in the same stream. One thing is clear, that if God be the author of our pleasures, he is likewise the author of our pains. The same constitution of nature that makes us capable of pleasure, exposes us to pain. Take away the capacity of pain, and with that you destroy the capacity of pleasure: reduce any of your senses to such a state that you can occasionally suffer nothing from them, and they will, at the same time, be reduced to such a state, that they shall afford you no enjoyment. The same course of nature around us, which furnishes us with the materials of pleasure, throws into our way the occasions and the causes of pain. The same storm that purifies the air, and contributes to our health, puts us in fear for the security of our dwellings; the same agitations of the water that prevent its putrefaction, and assist our commerce, wreck our vessels on the strand, make inroads on our territories, and wash away our cattle or our lands. The succession of day and night, the vicissitudes of the seasons, in themselves so agreeable, in their effects so delightful; the one so necessary for our repose, and to refit us for our labour; the other so necessary to fertilize the earth, and to bring to maturity its various

productions; both so necessary to the equal distribution of God's blessings to all nations, and to all climates, are, in innumerable instances, through the concurrence of that ignorance of futurity, which is the security of our peace and comfort, the causes of pain, of sickness, and of death.

So also in the moral world, by the same constitution of nature by which the companion of the wise groweth wise, the companion of fools is destroyed: through the same principles by which virtue is transfused as it were by virtuous associations, vice also is contagious. By the same principles of imitation through which we learn to speak at all, we may learn to speak evil of our neighbour, and to take the name of God in vain. The very same connexions that are useful, and even necessary to teach us wisdom, prudence, piety, humanity, and many other graces the ornament and delight of man, may, and will be the means, in some instances, of giving error something of the authority of truth, and folly something of the agreeableness of virtue, through the present imperfection of human nature, which is not in any individual to be found unperverted, or unblemished. In necessity it will pain us as much to ask, as it rejoices us to receive: and when others require

our help, we are first pained it may be, by their distresses, before we are delighted in relieving them. The rose, which, while it charms us with its fragrance and its beauty, may perchance wound us by the very means which nature has provided for its preservation, is itself an instance, in the natural world, of pain and pleasure united in, and proceeding from the same cause; and moreover, will be acknowledged, by those who have had experience in life, to be a very striking emblem of many other objects, pursuits, situations, and possessions in it.

AGAIN: Pain and pleasure rise together not only from the same constitution and the same course of nature, but even from the same event; which is another argument that the same God creates both good and evil. The same shower that refreshes my pasture, beats down, perhaps, your corn; the same gale that carries me to my desired haven, drives you from home, and on the rock. If it be reasonable that for this I should gratefully acknowledge God, you also must impute your calamities unto him, and humbly own his sovereignty, and your dependence.

THAT air which refreshes you who are in health, would be instant death unto the sick. That cold which benumbs the feeble infant,

strengthens and invigorates the perfect man ; that heat which oppresses him, comforts and enlivens the decline of age. The shortness and precariousness of life you reckon a calamity ; and the more exquisite its enjoyments are, the more you will acknowledge yourselves indebted for them ; yet the same cause works both these effects ; for in those climates which abound most with what are ordinarily called the pleasures and delights of life, the period of life is shortest, and the tenure of it most uncertain ; it sooner reaches its maturity, it sooner sinks into decay, and is all along more liable to be instantly and suddenly cut off.

BUT farther ; good springs out of evil, and pains themselves are the ministers of pleasure ; another argument that both are to be ascribed to one great Author.

THE feebleness of human infancy, our long dependance on the care and good will of others, and the injuries which, in respect both to our minds and bodies we are liable to contract, both from their ill judgment and neglect, have often been reckoned among the evils of human life, and magnified into mighty difficulties against the wisdom and the goodness of our Maker. In themselves, it is true, they are neither good nor pleasant, nor in any

way desirable ; but their consequences are so good, that it is not for human understanding to conceive, that any other initiation into life could have been more wise or kind. For in this is laid the foundation of all authority and discipline, of domestic, social, and civil peace ; of the good order and possession of our own minds. By this are tied the closest and the happiest bonds of communion upon earth : hence arise the amiable and useful sentiments of filial gratitude and reverence ; and hence the blessing, and the blest affections, of parental tenderness and love : the pains of hunger and thirst, of weariness and watching, have for their end the reparation and refreshment of the body ; the pains of heat and cold tend to keep it in that middle temperature which is at once most salutary and most delightful. Fear, if it create sorrow, creates precaution, and that precaution formed into habit, is our safety.

A CONSIDERABLE part of what we call the evils of life consists in the fear of losing its enjoyments ; and another considerable part of them consists in our sympathy with those who have lost them ; and the last is a principle which is accompanied with so much self-approbation, as soothes the pain it creates in our own hearts, while it powerfully tends to the com-

fort and relief of others: the first is a principle, which, if it pain, it is to bless us, to prolong our enjoyments by engaging us in the prudent use and the careful preservation of them.

THUS, to pass over all that might be said of the tendency of temporal evils to work out for us everlasting happiness, and the tendency of bodily and external ills to impart to us spiritual blessings, (i. e. blessings of a superior order, and of greater value,) the considerations that have been suggested may perhaps prevail to satisfy us, that the calamities and pains which we bewail so pathetically, and resent, perhaps, so impatiently, are not unworthy to proceed from the God of love, and that both our pleasures and our pains do, in fact, proceed from the same appointment and the same will. The same constitution of nature gives us the capacity of both; the same course of nature presents us with the causes and occasions of both; the same event that brings good to one, brings evil to another. Can there be a clearer proof, that if God's will and providence be concerned in one, it is equally concerned in both?

The very principles from which our evils flow are necessary to our blessings; it is the manifest design, and the natural tendency of

those evils too, to secure, to multiply, and to improve our joys; in our comforts we are blest; we are blest in what we do not call so; what doubt then can remain, that they have one author, even God? We conclude then as we began, that pain and pleasure, good and evil, have the same relation to the providence of God; that they are equally the effects of his will, and the subjects of his control.

DISCOURSE FOURTH.

LAMENTATIONS iii, 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS, WHEN
THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT ?*

ANOTHER observation I would offer to you on this subject, the nature and extent of the divine government, is this, viz.

2. THAT though the sceptre of God extendeth to all, and his providence is exercised over every creature, yet he rules every different species of beings by different laws, and governs all according to their respective natures.

I MEAN in general to be understood thus; viz. that in proportion as God has communicated to every class of beings the power of governing themselves, in that proportion his own immediate agency upon them is in some sense withdrawn, except so far as is necessary to preserve them in existence, to continue to them the exercise of their powers, to give efficacy to their volitions, or to control and regulate the effects of them. Thus, for ex-

ample, the government that God exercises over the material world, though not more uncontrollable, is more immediate, and in some sense more universal than that which he exercises over his sensible, intelligent, and moral creatures.

THE government of the material world consists in the preservation of its being and its form; in the just disposition of its minuter particles; in the constant support of their mutual relations and connexions; in the orderly production of those regular changes we behold in it, as well as of every other motion, and every other alteration in it which seem to us irregular and variable. All here appears upon just principles to be altogether and immediately the work of God; insomuch, that if you should ask concerning the stones of the field, who laid them on this, rather than on the other side, I could give you no other answer, than that it was the hand of God. If you should ask concerning the flower of the field, why it rose in that place at that season, or why it rose at all, I could give you no other answer, than that it was the operation of God; if you ask me concerning the flying clouds, why they pass in this, rather than in that direction, I can only tell you, that it is the guidance of God.

BUT, on the other hand, we cannot so truly say of his sensible creation, that every motion of theirs, that every change in their situation, proceeded from the immediate influence and guidance of God; to these he has imparted the power of motion from themselves; this supplies the place of his immediate impulse in the inanimate world. His agency, it is true, may be necessary to preserve their being and their powers; but the means by which he governs them, and bends, as it were, the powers he has imparted to them to his own purposes, is the disposition of the material world without them, by which he awakens in them those passions and affections whence all their actions and their conduct flow: by which he establishes or impairs their health, increases or wastes their powers, co-operates with their volitions, or counteracts them, excites in them sometimes desire, sometimes aversion, sometimes fear, sometimes wrath, or any other principle of motion and of action, as it may promote his counsels and fulfil his pleasure.

THUS, when the ark rested on the hills of Ararat, it was properly, and almost literally, the hand of God that fixed it there. But when Noah sent the dove out of the ark, and she returned, it was not so properly the im-

pulse of God that forced her out, it was her own deed from the joy of liberty. It was not so properly the impulse of God that sent her in again, as her own deed, because she found no food for her support, no rest, saith the Scripture, for the sole of her foot.

IF, from the brute creation, we direct our thoughts to the intelligent and moral offspring of God, we shall find, that the government he exercises over them is still different, according to their different natures. In their character of sensible beings, he governs them by the same laws and principles, by which the brutes are governed; i. e. not by the force of an immediate impulse, but by the influence of external objects on their hearts. Their frame, however, approaching nearer to the similitude of God, renders them capable of other ideas beside those that the external world presents to them; their affections are capable of being moved by things invisible and spiritual; as their views are not confined to what is within them and around them, futurities have an influence upon their hearts as well as those things that are present; and they are capable of discerning actions and affections, not only as they are in themselves and as they differ materially from one another, but under certain notions of right and wrong;

of beautiful and deformed ; of excellent and base ; of honourable and infamous ; of unworthy and dutiful.

HERE then is a new variety of principles or instruments by which God accomplishes his will, both in and by his intelligent and moral creatures. Is the disposition of external objects, at this moment, such as excites in them either desire or aversion ? These passions can be moderated, subdued, and even changed, by the consideration of the consequences that would follow the gratification of them on the one hand, or the mortification of them on the other. The intelligent and moral offspring of God may be corrected by the view of the influences, which the indulgence or denial of these passions might have upon the dignity and respectableness of their character : and, moreover, their ability to compare one thing with another, and their disposition to ascribe one event to a prior event, as its occasion or its cause, while, at the same time, beings so constituted must naturally regard some invisible intelligence, both as the Maker and Governor of the world, lead them to consider every evil that follows such a conduct as their sense of right and wrong, of base and honourable, disapproves, under the notion of a punishment,

or a testimony of the divine displeasure ; and, on the contrary, every good that follows such a conduct as the same principles dictate and approve, under the idea of a reward or testimony of the divine favour. This disposition, united with their natural propensity to pry into what is yet to come, leads them to regard their present lot, so far as it is connected with their moral conduct, or proceeds from it, as a sample of their future fate, or an omen of something like what is prepared for them hereafter.

HERE then is another helm, by which the great Ruler of the world steers it to its appointed end. So far as their natures are the same, he rules all his creatures by the same principles and laws ; so far as their natures differ, he rules them by different principles and laws, leaving each in the perfect possession of its peculiar properties and characters. Thus you see what, in this observation, it was my principal desire you should see, that we conceive there is no government of God, interfering with the accountableness of man ; no such agency of the great Creator on his creatures, as confounds all moral differences, as leaves no distinction between vice and virtue, or no pre-eminence of the good above the wicked. For if our representation of the

matter be not wrong, though there can be no merit or demerit, nothing either to praise or blame in any atom of the material world that it is in this situation rather than in that, because it was God who appointed, and who fixed it in its place: though there can be no vice or virtue in this or that conduct of the brutes, because, though they stray one way or the other, not by divine impulse, but from their own will and humour, yet it is without the knowledge that any thing is right or that any thing is wrong; notwithstanding this, wherever the ability to distinguish these is found, if that being acts not from the impulse, not as the instrument of another, but from his own volition and exertion, as the author of his own life and conversation, no consequences and external circumstances, no influence of foreign motives, (however they may contribute to keep that being under the dominion of him who has these circumstances at his disposal,) can contribute any thing towards exculpating him in what he does amiss, or to destroy his virtue in what he does aright.

WHATEVER is done voluntarily is done morally; if my will were engaged in the action, it is no matter what were its circumstances or what the inducements to it; my merit, if the action were good, lies in that rectitude of

will through which I own the force of those motives in which I feel my interest and my honour lay; my demerit, if the action were bad, lies in that perverseness or depravity of will, through which I resisted the force of those better motives, and yielded to such as hurt my interests, and disgraced my character. Take away my will, and I am not an agent, and therefore not accountable; take away my knowledge of good and evil, of right and wrong, and I am not a moral agent, and therefore not accountable. The knife is not a murderer, because it is an unconscious and involuntary instrument. The idiot or the madman is not a murderer, because he has not the sense and the knowledge of his obligations. I am not the criminal, if, against my intention and resolution, you forcibly employ my hand to give the wound; but you are perfectly criminal, if, unprovoked, uninjured, you have conceived the intention and exerted the volition to destroy me, though your intention has been frustrated, and your volition has failed. The guilt lies in the will, and the will was yours; nothing that you could plead can avail to exculpate you; it is nothing to say, that Providence had greatly distressed you in your circumstances, and that you hoped to relieve your necessities in plun-

dering me ; it is nothing to say, that I stood between you and your preferment ; it is nothing to say, that you were bribed, encouraged, instigated by another ; it is nothing to say, that from the frequent practice of cruelty you had acquired an unaccountable delight in it, and a strange propensity to such barbarities : these are motives which that principle which is set over all our other principles, as the director and the judge, condemns ; these are motives that ought not to have influenced you ; in your compliance with which lies your guilt ; and though the crime was not perpetrated, yet your guilt is perfected. No government that does not destroy our agency, no foreign influence that does not take away our power of choice, and render our actions absolutely involuntary, can destroy our accountability, or render us incapable of vice or virtue.

EVERY bad action that is imputable, must proceed from some bad motive ; and every action that proceeds from a good motive, whatever it be in itself, with respect to the character of the agent, is a good one. Our consciences will neither smite us the less, nor the world resent our conduct, or disdain our character the less, nor the evil consequences, the natural punishment of our crimes prove

the less, because we can assign the motives that induced us to them in our circumstances, or in our situation: (things that were not in our power :) on the contrary, if we can assign no motive for our conduct, whatever might be the judgment of the world upon it, our consciences not knowing to what principle it was to be ascribed, would neither approve nor condemn us for the action. Though it should be admitted therefore for truth, that almost every object that surrounds us, and almost every circumstance in our situation, awakens in us some sentiment or affection that has a close connexion with our conduct, yet so long as these objects, and these circumstances, do not take away our agency, or divest us of our will, though they be appointed us by God, though they be the means through which he accomplishes his purposes in respect to us, yet this government of his does not destroy our moral nature, or supersede either the justice or propriety of our appearance at his judgment-seat.

THUS, though we conceive that God exercises an uncontrollable dominion over all his creatures, yet we conceive, that it is in such a manner as to leave the distinguishing characteristics of each, entire and unviolated; and in particular, that the government which he

exercises with regard to man, whether in disposing the circumstances of his situation, or in controlling the effects of his volitions, is such as does not at all destroy his accountableness, or interfere with the character and obligations of moral agency.

THERE yet remain to be considered some other general observations concerning the Divine Providence and government; at present I shall only add the following reflections.

LET it be remembered, that we have not yet proved the doctrine of God's government, but only in part explained to you something of the idea we have formed of it. Turn back your thoughts. Do not wonder if you find it difficult to enter into some of the notions that have been presented to you, or to form a clear and comprehensive idea of the divine government. Incomprehensible as he is in his nature, what marvel is it that the counsels of God "should be unsearchable, and his judgments a great deep?" Ever mindful of the mighty disproportion that there is between human faculties and divine perfections, between the exertions of the human nature and the operations of the Supreme Being, let all your conceptions of him be formed with the most perfect modesty and diffidence, and all your contemplations, and all your reason-

ings concerning him, conducted with the profoundest reverence and fear.

YOUR inquiries after God, your endeavours to become, in any respect, more acquainted with your Maker, while they are neither presumptuous in themselves, nor uncharitable in their influences, are laudable and acceptable. In such inquiries, the difficulties that we meet with ought not to impair our faith, but to improve our humility. A few self-evident principles excepted, there is nothing in the world concerning which difficulties may not arise, and to which objections may not be urged. If this were a justification of infidelity, there could be no faith upon earth, for whatever is self-evident is not an object of faith but a subject of knowledge. If in our researches after God we acquire nothing but a new and sensible conviction that he is great, and we know him not; if they sink us into deeper veneration of our Maker; if they lead us to prostrate ourselves before him with humbler adorations, and to address him in strains of lowlier self-abasement, they have been good, and they have done good, and are just matter of approbation and of thanksgiving. Consider then what you have heard, and may God lead you to the true improvement of it.

DISCOURSE FIFTH.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS,
WHEN THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT?*

WE proceed now to some other observations concerning the nature of the divine government.

3. As the government of God is accommodated to the different nature of his different creatures, so also is it adapted to the various circumstances and characters of individuals.

IF God does exercise any government at all over the world, we have the highest reason to conceive, that it is exercised in perfect wisdom and in perfect love: for these are his attributes, and they are the characteristics of every thing that is divine. It is very true, that in many instances our faculties may be unable to perceive them, and that the divine conduct may be both wise and good where to us it is mysterious and inexplicable; but

wherever, upon a clear and comprehensive survey, we discern concerning any thing that it would be unwise or unkind, there, we may safely conclude, that such neither is, nor will be the conduct of God towards his creatures.

IT requires no sagacity to discern, that a great part of wisdom lies in accommodating our conduct, upon all occasions, to the circumstances of others. Though all men possess the same general nature, yet whoever should treat all men in the same general manner, without distinction, and without variation, would hardly rise into reputation for wisdom and honour. For, whatever were his aim, he would find that it could not be obtained in respect of all men in the same manner, and by the same means; whether he meant to secure unto himself their esteem and reverence; to bend their will into compliance with his own; to establish his authority; to insure their obedience; whether he meant to instruct, to correct, to comfort, or encourage them; to lead them into truth; to divest them of their follies; to improve them in virtue; to guard them against snares and dangers; to secure, or to promote their happiness; whatever were his aim, if he knew the different circumstances and tempers of mankind, if wisdom were his counsellor, he

would vary his application according to the variety of his subjects; because what succeeds with one, might ruin his intentions with respect to another.

There is, it seems, from whatever it arises, a mental, as well as a bodily constitution; a certain peculiarity of frame, that requires, upon every occasion, to be treated in a certain manner. As that which would cure a disease in one body may confirm it in another, so that by which we might obtain our wishes upon one mind, upon another might obstruct, and even defeat them.* The giddy and the serious, the gay and the melancholy, the sanguine and the despondent, the tender and the unfeeling, the self-willed and the compliant, the diffident and the presumptuous, the credulous and the suspicious, the modest and the vain, the passionate and the cool, the sensual and the spiritual mind, the prosperous and the afflicted, the busy and

* Does not this supply an answer to the question so often asked, why the children of a numerous family, all of them subject, as far as appears, to the same external influences, should so often turn out in their progress through life such very different characters? And is it not a very serious call upon parents, masters, and guardians, to study the temper of those committed to their care, and as far as possible to adapt their mode of treatment to what the peculiar temperament of the respective individuals may seem to require? EDITOR.

the vacant, the knowing and the ignorant, the easy, whose thoughts are much confined within the present, and the anxious, whose imaginations are ever stretching forward into futurity; these, it is evident, require different treatment; if you would in any thing succeed with them, they must be attempted each in a manner peculiar to himself; and though they be ruled by the same general principles, if you would rule them without control, and make them all subservient to your designs, these principles must be modified, timed, circumstanced, restrained, aided, qualified in various methods, according to the various tempers and humours you have to deal with.

IN a proper application to different characters, lies a very great part of wisdom and of prudence; and as these different tempers, are, in some measure, if not altogether, formed by the influence of external circumstances upon us from our first entrance into life, so, by the change of these, they are capable of being greatly changed. Our temper will, in some degree correspond to, and accompany our circumstances through all their variations; and even, after that peculiar habit or constitution of mind, which will probably prevail through our lives, is formed, an alteration

of external circumstances, a new occurrence will, for the time, produce a proportionate alteration in ourselves; and hence arise those seasons in which we feel not the force of the principles whereby at other times we are ruled; or in which we are moved by those things of which, at other times, we are insensible.

IN a just knowledge of these seasons, and a careful attention to them, consists another considerable part of wisdom and of prudence necessary to all who would maintain their authority, and carry their designs with others. Through the ignorance and neglect of these, what we meant for a chastisement might prove an encouragement; what we meant for a blessing, might prove a curse; what we meant for an inducement to comply with our desires, might prove a reason of opposing them. The same effect must often be produced by different means in different persons; and at different seasons by different means, even in the same person.

THUS the influence of men on men is circumstanced; and it is by these means that the power and authority of men over men is maintained. It makes no difference from what quarter the influence proceeds; circumstances would facilitate or obstruct its opera-

tion equally, whether it proceed from God or man. When he acts in them, it matters not what opposes, or what concurs with his designs; but while he treats them as rational and voluntary agents, his conduct, it would seem, both in wisdom and in kindness, must, upon the forementioned principles, be different towards different individuals, according to their respective tempers and their various situations.

To form all men to virtue and to happiness by the very same means, seems as impossible as to conduct the inhabitants of any country from every corner of it to its centre, by one and the same road. We conclude then, that as a wise and good father of a family will rule all his household by the laws of righteousness and kindness, and yet suit his conduct to the various tempers and circumstances of every member of it, so God, whose love is perfect, whose wisdom is infallible, and whose power is equal to all his purposes, will adapt his dealings with his creatures to their respective tempers and situations; i. e. he will accommodate their circumstances quite through life to their characters in general, and at every moment to their various situations at the time, in such a manner as shall keep them absolutely under his control, and best promote

the great designs of his providence with respect both to themselves and to others, through their means.

IF you consider the different characters of men as arising from an original difference of frame, there is no difficulty in this conception; if you consider them as arising from the influence of the first scenes of life they pass through, forming what we call a mental constitution, the difficulty is not great; for what we say amounts to this; that as all events are in the hands of God, and all the circumstances of his intelligent creatures at his disposal, he so connects and regulates them, from the beginning of their existence, that their effects, both for the present and in their succession one after another, shall accomplish his purposes with respect to every individual, and carry on those designs of his to which he meant they should be subservient.

FOR example: let us take it for granted that this is a scene of discipline, and that the great aim of Providence is to form mankind to virtue: it is easy to apprehend, that a great diversity of natural tempers mingled together in society, may contribute much to this desirable end. By affording the mutual conviction of the inconveniences and advan-

tages of each, they will tend to perfect one another; they will open a wide field for the devout contemplation and adoration of the Divine Perfection, who can in the same species of creatures produce such mighty differences, and yet make all harmoniously work together for the common good, and keep all in subjection to himself, and in subserviency to his will; they will afford occasion to many virtues which otherwise could never have been known; they will teach mankind mutual tenderness and indulgence, and lead them to unite together; that since in themselves separately they do not find all perfection, they may find the mutual supply of their deficiencies and wants in their mutual union. For these, and many other like reasons that might be specified, a diversity of natural tempers is exceedingly desirable in a state of discipline.

THIS being agreed on, let us go on to suppose, that one man's natural temper is a tender sensibility of heart, and that of another a rigid unfeelingness of spirit; the one is formed to despise dangers, and to overlook the sufferings of his brethren: the other trembles at the sight of evil, and is oppressed by too lively a sympathy with the calamities of others. It is no matter whether this difference proceeds from original constitution,

or from the influence of other men, or of external circumstances in early life; for wise reasons God appoints, from some cause or other, this diversity.

How then shall the obduracy, and the presumption of the one, be formed to humanity and prudence; how shall the tender sensibility of the other be enabled to sustain itself, so that its comfort and its usefulness shall not be lost by the excess of those principles, which in a just degree would be safe to itself, and beneficial to others? Let the one be exposed and endangered; let the danger overtake him; let pain and misery be its issue, and he will in time be cured of his inhumanity and his presumption, and will learn to fear upon just occasions, and to pity where compassion would become him. Let the other be familiarized with danger; let him also be familiarized with deliverance; let his lot be cast among the children of affliction; through habit, both his own dangers and their sorrows will affect him less, and by and by he will attain to that self-command and steadiness of mind which alone was wanting to make him capable of self-defence, and capable of usefulness to others.

GOD has purposes to serve by us, as well as in us; the obdurate and presumptuous may

be a proper instrument to scourge a wicked family, or a wicked nation; and his oppression, while it teaches them humility and virtue, may awaken in them that resentment which shall ultimately reduce him into those distresses that shall correct and reform himself. The tender-hearted and the diffident is a proper counsellor for the presumptuous or the thoughtless; a proper comforter for the afflicted and distressed. If he be by any tie of nature, or of duty, connected particularly with these, the dangers into which the one is betrayed by his presumption, may form him to fortitude; the distresses under which the others labour, may habituate him to those scenes of sorrow that at first oppressed him, and cause him to exert his best endeavours, his manliest resolution, that his sympathy may not increase but mitigate their afflictions; that it may be not merely painful, but also useful.

To take another instance. One man is born with a certain tameness and meekness of soul, or this temper is early formed in him by the circumstances of his situation; another, from the same causes, possesses a less patient, and more enterprising spirit. Moses was well appointed for the leader and law-giver of a stiff-necked and perverse generation

in their pilgrimage, while at the same time, their provocations, insults, and injuries, were well adapted to prevent his meekness from degenerating into mere abjectness of mind. Joshua was as wisely nominated for their captain in the land of Canaan where their business was to conquer, and if they proved not submissive, to extirpate the people that they conquered: the meekness of Moses could not so well have discharged this commission, while, on the other hand, in the difficulties of this enterprise, and the miseries it occasioned, the hardiness of Joshua found sufficient matter for the exercise and improvement of humility and compassion in himself. And with respect to the Jews in general, we may observe, as we pass along, that their circumstances, in these dispensations of Providence, were wonderfully adapted to their character and dispositions, their wanderings in the wilderness, where they met with so many difficulties, to inculcate on them patience and submission; where they needed so many interpositions of Divine Power to confirm their faith in the living God; and their commission to subdue those nations that were overrun with idolatry and vice, to preserve them from that wickedness and superstition, to which they had

contracted so violent an attachment in Egypt.

THESE thoughts may, perhaps, do something towards explaining to you what we mean when we say, that the government of God is adapted to the various circumstances and characters of individuals; and to convince you, that if God does indeed govern the world, it is reasonable to conceive of his government as extending to individuals in the same manner as it does to every species of creatures: in the one case, accommodating his laws to the respective nature of his creatures, and in the other, adapting his appointments to the respective temper and character of his subjects.

DISCOURSE SIXTH.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS,
WHEN THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT ?*

THERE yet remains a very important view of this subject, in which we have not hitherto considered this general observation, i. e. as it respects the morality of human characters; on the one hand their merit, by which we understand their goodness, excellence, and approvableness; on the other hand, their demerit, by which we understand their worthlessness, baseness, and contemptibleness.

HITHERTO we have considered the character as consisting only in a certain turn or disposition of mind, what we often call natural temper; which, though it may in many instances be favourable or unfavourable to virtue, is yet, in many instances at least, perfectly indifferent in itself, neither moral nor immoral. With respect to this we have endeavoured to illustrate our observation;

i. e. to show you, that we have just cause to conceive of the government of God, as accommodated to the natural temper of his subjects. It is difficult, it is even impossible from fact to prove this, and that for a very plain reason. We cannot, in many instances, come to any knowledge of men's natural temper; and in no instance can we attain a perfect knowledge of it; for, though it may appear so manifestly as to exclude all doubt that this or the other principle prevails in them, yet so many various principles may be combined together in it, and these in such various proportions and such different degrees, that it perhaps requires an understanding equal to that by which the human soul is formed, and by which the circumstances of man are regulated, to discern that wise connexion and just accommodation between the one and the other, which would be a conclusive argument, that the appointment was divine. The considerations that have been suggested to you may, perhaps, afford a probable presumption of the truth of our conception; and if hereafter it should appear, that God has either expressly, or implicitly declared, that he does accommodate his government to the tempers of men, we may then proceed with perfect confidence to pursue

this important truth through all its practical consequences.

WITH regard however, to the moral character of his intelligent creation, we are not left merely to presume upon fair conjectures and probable considerations that a part of the divine government, or one principle of it, is to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked: i. e. in the distribution of pain and pleasure, in the disposition of their circumstances, and the regulation of the external events of life, God gives encouragement to the righteous, together with the means of improvement in virtue, and discourages the wicked, chastising them for their sins, and giving them, in the uneasiness of their hearts or of their circumstances, persuasive motives and arguments to repentance.

THIS is that part of the divine government which is most ordinarily called, the moral government of God; by which, as being righteous himself, and loving righteousness, he manifests his favour to the good, and as hating iniquity, he also signifies his displeasure against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. That this ought to enter into our idea of the Divine Providence and dominion, we need not argue either from the wisdom or the goodness of God, or from any of

his other attributes; we can produce the proof from fact; we can appeal to the general observation of all thoughtful men, and to the particular experience both of the godly and of the sinner.

WHAT is the object of human approbation? Not riches, not honour, not pleasure; these may be the objects of our envy and our desire, but we say that our praise is prostituted, when for these alone it is bestowed upon their possessors; our approbation, our esteem, is sacred unto virtue. The great may be flattered by their dependants, and the voluptuous may be envied by the sensual; but it is the good man whom all men love; whose life all men mean one day to imitate, and whose death all men wish to die.

WHO are the just objects of our contempt and our distaste? Not the poor, the obscure, and the weak: though with our hands we may not assist, yet in our hearts we pity them; if their wickedness has not alienated our compassion from them, they have a very moving advocate in our breasts antecedent to any knowledge of their character: as soon as we know their circumstances, we become their friends because they need our friendship. It is the wicked we cannot admit into our hearts; it is the wicked we detest; the irreligious, the

profane, the licentious scorner, the impious blasphemer, whose heart acknowledges no God, and whose lips audaciously insult him. It is the unrighteous, the cruel, the fraudulent, the oppressive, who cares not what others suffer if he himself be gratified; who heeds not what others lose, if his own interest be promoted. It is the uncandid and censorious, whose evil eyes see every thing in an ungracious light, and whose heart has no allowances to make for the imperfections and infirmities of others; it is the envious evil speaker that delights in publishing his neighbour's shame; it is the false calumniator, who to gratify his love of scandal, if his neighbour has no shame, makes him some to publish, presumptuously sits in judgment on his conduct and his principles, and passing over what is so bright that it cannot be shaded, dwelling on what is darker and less apparent, ignorantly and confidently decides, that these things ought not so to be, and takes a malignant pleasure to place every thing in the most invidious aspect. It is the sensual, so much more brutal than the beasts beneath them, as these have no moral taste, no moral appetites to gratify; it is the sensual, whose anxieties are all employed about the pleasing of the flesh, and who wallow in their base indulgences, without bounds or shame.

These are the objects of our contempt and detestation, to whom nothing but a tenderness for ourselves, proceeding from similarity of character, can reconcile us ; these are characters to which, in its natural state, the heart of man has so violent an aversion, that it is in great danger of losing all sentiments of goodwill towards them, except those that relate to their reformation. We behold them with indignation, we treat them with compassion ; from their chastisements praying that they may issue in repentance. If we derived our nature from the will of God ; if it be from the will of God that it still retains this constitution, what can be a clearer argument that we are to take this distinction of his creatures according to their moral character, into our idea of the government of God ?

ARE you of a tender and a sickly frame ? Will vice or virtue be most favourable to your health ? Pining discontent, angry passions, peevish fretfulness, worldly anxieties, sensual excesses, the gnawings and forebodings of an evil conscience, will aggravate your burdens, and render your diseases at once both more distressing and more obstinate ; on the other hand, composure and tranquillity of mind ; a calm resignation to the will of God ; a lively faith in the wisdom and equity of his govern-

ment; the devout recommendation of yourselves to him in the faithful discharge of all your duties, according to your strength; the prospect of a better state; the kind affections of benevolence and love; the cheering hopes, and the heartfelt satisfactions that attend on conscious goodness, will make even the sickliest life not an unpleasant life, will sooth its pains, and revive its languors. Virtue is a good preservative of health, a noble cordial in sickness, and desirable, even as a means to facilitate our restoration and recovery.

ARE you poor? Is it indolence or industry that must supply your wants? After all your labours, do you still need the help and the liberality of others? Which will be your best recommendation, insolence or modesty? Which will be the most successful advocate, a good character, or a bad one? After all your own diligence can do, and the charity of others will do, are you still in straits and difficulties; your own necessities almost forgotten in the pressing wants of your children and of your family, where will you find peace and comfort? in the guilty conscience that forbids you to trust in God, or in that holy temper which, not condemned at home, is approved of Heaven, and encourages and supports the most steady confidence in him, with-

out whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground, who clothes the lilies of the field, and feedeth the ravens when they cry?

ARE you rich? Who enjoys his riches, he who riotously wastes them in luxurious pleasures; he who vainly dissipates them in idle ostentation; he who infamously hides his talent in the earth; or he, who like God, is good, and delights in goodness, and imitates those tender mercies of his Maker, that are extended unto all his works? In every circumstance that you can suppose, the comforts, the advantages, the enjoyment of those circumstances, are on the side of virtue. Do you say your case is bad? vice will make it worse: do you say it is good; virtue will make it better still: the one will improve the worst, and the other will ruin the very best of human circumstances. Peace at home, and good will abroad, are the natural fruits of virtue, and do in fact generally accompany it; while, on the other hand, vice is as naturally and as generally disturbed with a troubled conscience and an uneasy life.

THIS might be produced as itself an argument, and a conclusive argument, of God's attention to the affairs of men, and therefore will readily be admitted when it is offered, only as a reason why we ought to include in

our notion of the divine government both the internal and external distinctions that we find between vice and virtue; for, if God does at all rule the world, and dispose of its events, these being found to take place in fact, are to be numbered among the effects and operations of his government. We conclude then with respect both to their natural tempers and their moral characters, that the divine government over his creatures is exercised in such a manner as to distinguish between those that differ, and to accommodate their circumstances to themselves. We proceed to observe,

4. THAT it appears that the government of God, so far at least as it respects intelligent and voluntary beings, is in part carried on by the instrumentality of others.

MANY things that have been mentioned under the preceding heads might be repeated here for the illustration of this; we shall therefore only add, that if God does at all govern the world, this must be owned as a certainty, since the being, the powers, the natural abilities, the moral dispositions of mankind, if they may not be said to proceed from men, are very materially affected both in themselves and in their operations by the influence of men, capable of being variously

modified, and often actually undergoing very important changes from that influence.

FOR the truth of this we may appeal to every species of authority; to all kinds of associations, to example, education, and to many other modes of human influence, by which the talents of mankind are enlarged, or fettered, their natural tempers formed, their dispositions afterwards corrected or depraved, and their moral characters changed, or fixed and determined for the better or the worse, which effects produce such extensive and important consequences in human life, that no government which comprehends not the direction and control of these can be able to effectuate its purposes among men. These therefore, as they determine much with respect to every individual, and in that, with respect to all to whom their influence may extend, must undoubtedly be subject to the will of God, and are reasonably considered as the instruments of his government.

IF God dispenses unto men their external circumstances; if he appoints them their situation and their connexions in life; if he changes these according to his pleasure, he likewise directs the influence they shall lie under, and determines the continuance and the extent of that influence. If it be the

will of God that the new-born infant shall be preserved and live, he commits it to the care of prudent and tender friends; if it be his will that it shall be early formed to knowledge and to virtue, that the seeds of these being soon implanted in it, may make great improvement, and be greatly useful in the little period of human life, he places it within the reach of knowing and of virtuous friends, that through their instruction and example it may gain wisdom.

IN general, whatever may be said of those dispositions and principles in others from which the influence on ourselves proceeds; whether it be to our benefit, or our hurt, the necessary and unavoidable effects of that influence upon us are clearly to be ascribed to God; it is his will that we should suffer or be profited by them, we are therefore to regard all civil government, with its effects and consequences, as constituting a part of the government of God, as an instrument by which he carries on his designs with respect to men; and in the same light we are to consider also, parental power and authority, all the social connexions in which we find ourselves, all the treatment of whatever kind which we receive from others. Though God did not give them the dispositions whence

their conduct towards us flows, yet he placed us within the reach of those dispositions, and that, either for the trial and improvement of our virtues, or for some other benefit to ourselves, or, through our instrumentality, to others.

DISCOURSE SEVENTH.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS, WHEN
THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT ?*

WE may observe in the fifth place, that the government of God is carried on by general laws; that is to say, that as in human governments the laws are a certain rule by which we may in general judge upon every occasion what will be the conduct of the governor towards his subjects; so the government of God, both natural and moral, proceeds in that steady constant manner, that wherever the situation, circumstances, and character of his creatures, are perfectly the same, we may confidently expect the same effects and consequences.

As it seems wise that the government of God should be carried on by the instrumentality of others, that men might not be detached and separate from one another, but might live in mutual friendship and depen-

dance, united to one another by the ties of gratitude and love, and repelled only from those evil characters which, having no kind regard for others, deserve not to receive any benefit from them ; so also does it seem wise and even necessary, that the government of God should be carried on according to general laws ; i. e. that the blessings and the evils of life, its pleasures and its pains, should be dispensed after a certain steady rule, so that the faculties of his intelligent creatures might be of some use and service to them, and that the just exertion of them might find its just encouragement. Without this, there could be no foundation for that wisdom which we call experience. In the most advanced age, we should die with as little knowledge of the true use and end and rule of life, as we set out with in its earliest periods.

If the harvest did not regularly succeed the seed time ; if the produce did not answer both in quantity and in quality to what was sown ; if this were a long summer's day, and the next a short winter's gleam ; if that which is to-day our food, should to-morrow be our poison ; if that by which we now delight, and please, and serve our friends, should ere long be a pain, a disturbance, and disservice to them, what a scene of confusion would be

human life! how full of doubt and suspicion would our conduct be! how vain the reasonable powers, and how miserable the situation of mankind!

THE same regularity is necessary, and the same regularity is observed also, in the moral government of God. If one mode of conduct were one while the general interest of mankind, and another while, as general an injury; if at one time virtue were beautiful and respectable in the eyes of others, and approved within our own hearts; and at another time vice produced the same good-will, and the same self-satisfaction; if one while a pious education made men good, and another while virtue arose from licentious principles and examples; if the means of grace should presently become the means of corruption; if prayer should to-day be the nurse of virtue, and another day be its bane; men could have no rule to determine what was duty, no ground whereon to build their pleasures and their hopes. All wisdom, and all obligation, would cease of course; and if the frame of nature itself were not dissolved, all government, both human and divine, would be destroyed. But again,

6. NOTWITHSTANDING that the government of God be ordinarily administered by the in-

instrumentality of others, notwithstanding that it be ordinarily administered according to stated general laws, yet it is necessary to remember, that if God be indeed the ruler of the world, this instrumentality, and these laws, are the result of his will; and therefore exclude not the possibility, or even the probability, that if any just occasion offers, an occasion in which the instrumentality of others, according to their natural powers, or in which the laws that are established according to their constant tenor, cannot accomplish the divine purposes, or would defeat them, (occasions of which we have not, and of which we cannot have a competent discernment,) that in such cases God may act immediately by his own right hand as it were, and suspend, or even counteract those laws by which he usually conducts his government.

THE same authority that enacts surely can repeal, and the same power that could, the same will that would superintend the interest of the world by the mediation of other agents, may, upon good evidence, be believed, on fit occasions, to administer its affairs without such mediation.

THERE is no absurdity, as some have very absurdly asserted, in a divine interposition or

supernatural event; there is nothing contradictory in the idea of a miracle, nor any thing in the nature of it that renders it incapable of evidence. If God can destroy the world which he has made, where is the difficulty in believing that he can reverse the laws he has prescribed to it? If it was for the benefit of the world that he ordained these laws, or observes them in his government, where is the absurdity in believing, that when the benefit of the world would better be promoted by it, he not only can, but will suspend these laws, or, if it be needful, so long as that necessity may continue, will violate and counteract them?

THE laws of nature are nothing in themselves; it is but an idea which man has formed, from the observation that the events of life have a certain connexion, and proceed in a certain tenour. The laws of nature are most justly regarded as the manner in which the Lord of nature ordinarily chooses to conduct his operations; and will any man affirm that God *cannot*, will any man doubt, can any man who believes his absolute perfection doubt that he *must*, change that manner of operation whenever the happiness of his creatures, or whatever other ends he has in view, would be better promoted by the change,

than by the continuance of it? In the last place,

7. I SHALL only add, that with regard to all practical consequences of this doctrine, with regard to all the influences which the consideration of the divine government ought to have, and would naturally have upon our temper and our conduct, it is a matter of perfect indifference whether we suppose with some, that every event takes place at the proper season, and in its appointed circumstances, in consequence of certain delegated powers, united, blended, proportioned, and throughout all their successive operations adjusted to one another in the first formation of the world, with infinite and incomprehensible wisdom; or, whether they proceeded from successive commands or operations of God, acting from time to time according to circumstances and emergencies.

IF to-day God has given me peace, and health, and plenty, and afforded me the opportunity of attending on his public worship, what is it to me whether I received these blessings in consequence of a pre-established order and series of events settled from the beginning of the world, or whether I receive them through his particular command, or through his interposition this day? On both

suppositions he is equally the Author of my mercies, and equally entitled to my gratitude and love. If I profane or abuse this day of God, and to-morrow, for the chastisement of my sins, God should visit me with sorrow, what is it to me whether that sorrow proceeds from a pre-established order of events, formed upon the foresight of my folly, and adjusted to it, or from an immediate operation of God? In both cases, being connected with my folly, and succeeding it, it is equally my punishment; has in both cases an equal tendency to awaken me to serious thought and devout reflection; and in both cases requires to be acknowledged with equal humility, and improved with equal care and diligence.

IF I stand in need of any blessing which lies not within the reach of my own endeavours; if, for example, my fields be scorched up, and want rain from heaven to refresh them, that they may yield sufficient sustenance for me and for my family, what is it to me whether the order of events be or be not settled from the beginning? I will address my prayers to God; in either case it is highly becoming that I should acknowledge my dependance upon him, and his absolute dominion over universal nature. He heareth prayer,

and he accepteth the prayer of the upright. I know that no order of events is so settled but, if it be best, he can break that order; whatever we ask of him we must ask according to his will; we must ask conditionally if it be upon the whole wisest and best, or, asking amiss, we shall neither receive nor be received. And wherein a prayer thus restrained and qualified, differs from praying unto God upon the supposition of a pre-established order, I am unable to discern, for both contain in them the same sentiments, both express the same hopes and expectations, the same devout resignation and cheerful confidence; they will both produce the same effects upon ourselves, and issue in that which is according to the will of God.

No wise order, no moral order, can be settled, but upon a foresight of what will, at every moment, be the temper and the character of every individual in his intelligent creation. A part of that order plainly is, that the best shall be best treated, and that when they do well, it shall be well with them. A part of that order probably is, that he who asks shall receive; this is certain in the case of all spiritual blessings, since the devout supplication of them is not only a procuring but an efficient cause of them:

hence arises a presumption, that to ask for them is an ordinary condition of receiving any blessings that we want, and of enjoying them after we have received them, if they be needful to us, and that God has not put them in our own power.*

WHEN we are in the way of duty, we are then most certainly in the way of mercy, and, to recur to that example that we lately mentioned, if, after our supplications, we receive the blessing that we want; on one notion of the divine government, it was the command given at that season that the windows of heaven should be opened; on the other notion, it was the will of God, foreseeing that the want of that blessing would lead us to the devout acknowledgment and the humble supplication of his mercy, that from the beginning such a series of events should be carried on, that when we prayed to him, and not before, the blessing that we wished for should arrive.

AND so, on the contrary, if upon our supplication we receive not the blessing, the

* This reasoning, so just and conclusive, ought for ever to settle the long unquitting controversy on the efficacy of prayer, on which so much has been said, whilst the true grounds on which the argument rests have been so little understood.

account must, on both suppositions, be the same, viz. that it was not upon the whole, in consideration of ourselves, or of others connected with us, and with us interested in the event, or in its consequences, wisest and best that we should receive it. And in general we would observe, that on both these notions of the divine government we may use the same forms of speech, since in respect to every thing in which human duty is concerned, they are in the last result the same.

YOUR time will not allow me to add any particular application of what has now been delivered to you: if these thoughts shall engage you in the study of the divine government, and the contemplation of God's providence, it is well: in a nobler study you cannot be engaged; nor is there any contemplation more fruitful in wise instructions, in salutary admonitions, and in reviving consolations. Consider then the works of God, and meditate upon his ways; and may he who has all hearts in his hands, so direct and prosper the workings of your minds, that your thoughts of him may be just, and your meditations on him sweet.

DISCOURSE EIGHTH.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS, WHEN
THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT?*

IN the progress of our Discourse we come now to the second general head, in which we proposed to lay before you some of those considerations from which the providence and government of God receives its credibility; and that, not so much for your conviction, as your confirmation in the belief of a doctrine so important both to the present and the future happiness of mankind.

THOUGH you be Christians, and Christians I would hope from principle, not from fashion, it is advisable that you should frequently inspect not only the general foundations of your faith, but those special principles also on which every article of it rests.

WITH respect to matters of curious speculation, or of mere amusement, in which neither the honour of the Gospel, nor the perfection of your character is concerned, it may be well not to occupy yourselves, and for this reason, that concerning such things you may find it difficult to form any clear opinions; you may find yourselves perplexed by the arguments adduced to support them; and if, without full conviction, you unreservedly embrace this or the other notion, you will be in danger of adhering to it obstinately to the prejudice of charity;* or, if you find yourselves at any time obliged to quit what has been long, and, in your judgment during all that

* How perpetually does this happen: such being the propensity of frail imperfect human beings to substitute what may flatter their own vanity, and create them no trouble, such as the orthodoxy on the one hand, or the perfect rationality, on the other, of their own particular creed, in lieu of holiness of heart and life, and entire devotedness to the will of God! Were it not so, should we hear so repeatedly of the efficacy of particular doctrines, and so freely anathematize all who cannot embrace them? Would it contribute nothing to the spread of vital Christianity, if the interesting inquiry of the Jewish expounder of the law, what he should do to inherit eternal life? together with the important reply returned by our divine Master, after he had repeated to him the command, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and mind, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves, were constantly had in remembrance: "This do and thou shalt live." EDITOR.

time, lawfully in possession of your mind, it will perplex you, it will hurt your peace, and perhaps bring a suspicion upon other articles of your faith, more defensible, more rational, and more momentous. Moreover, such sort of investigations are the less important, even if certainty could be obtained, as there are few matters of doubtful disputation in which the conduct of our lives is concerned; and there are few circumstances of life that can have any effect upon our apprehensions of these, either to change or to confirm the opinions we may have formed of them.

THIS, however, is not the case with those very important principles of religion, which not only extend their influence to our lives, but are themselves affected by the circumstances of them. It is fit that those principles which are to give us the rule of our conduct should receive their confirmation in our experience. It is wise also that that experience should sometimes put our faith in them to the trial; for, as the wind which shakes the tree makes it strike its roots the deeper, and fixes it more firmly in its situation, so, those occurrences which shake our faith in those important principles of religion wherein our duty and our comfort is concerned, naturally lead the mind to such

thoughts and exercises as tend to strengthen and confirm it.

THUS, for instance ; though there be nothing in the experience of life, in its circumstances or its changes, that can effect any notions we have conceived concerning the modes of the divine presence, or the divine operation, matters of no moment if the presence of God and his agency be acknowledged ; yet, with respect to this presence, and this agency itself, i. e. with respect to the Divine Providence and government, as there are on the one hand abundant demonstrations of this doctrine, which cannot fail to meet us as we pass through life, so there are on the other hand, those seasons and occasions through which we may be tempted to doubt concerning the Providence of God, in which our faith, if it forsake us not, may fail us.

WHEN, for example, through the pressure of afflictions, whether our own or those of others, to whom we think we justly wish better things, or through the unmerited elevation and unhallowed prosperity of the wicked, our faith in the divine government may sink below that degree of vivacity and steadiness, in which, for the sake both of peace and duty, it were desirable that we should continually maintain it, it is natural to suppose, that the

more we familiarize to ourselves the arguments by which the doctrine of the divine government is supported, the more steadfast will be our faith in it, and less affected by obstacles and difficulties. It is reasonable to believe, that the confidence we repose in the declarations of God's word will be the more perfect, and the more efficacious, in proportion as the authority it derives from these declarations is accompanied by a clearer and more comprehensive discernment of their evidence.

IT is one thing to believe the truth, because it is a part of what we judge justly to be the oracles of God; and another thing to believe it, because we perceive its reasonableness.—Whichever of these considerations may have first gained our assent to any doctrine, add the other also, and our faith will be considerably confirmed and enlivened; our hearts will then dismiss every suspicion, and rest upon it with the most perfect satisfaction.

SINCE, therefore, the doctrine of the divine government is evidently a doctrine of great importance, and of extensive practical consequences; since, as the love of any object, if the ardours within be not often fed by repeated meditation upon the amiableness of it, will grow cold; faith also, if it be not from

time to time strengthened and renewed by the contemplation of that evidence which produces it, will grow languid, and will decay. Since, besides this natural decline the unhappy consequence of our neglect, untoward circumstances and various occurrences of the world may impair our faith, if they do not totally subvert it, and take away from us the admonitions and consolations of so salutary a doctrine, at a time perhaps when we may most stand in need of them; it is our prudence, and at the same time our duty, to fortify ourselves in the belief of the divine government, by a constant attention to its displays and operations,* and by a serious review of such thoughts as I am now about to recommend to you.

IT is not meant to enter very largely into all the evidences of the divine government; a complete representation of them is not the

* Hence a decisive argument in favour of the unspeakable importance of the daily perusal of the holy Scriptures. It must indeed be admitted that the frequent allusions to ancient customs, the many practices founded upon them, together with the highly figurative language of eastern phraseology, so essential to the complete proof of the genuineness of the writings, must render some parts obscure, and liable to be misunderstood by the unlearned reader: But how abundantly is this compensated by the constant reference to the agency of the one living and true God, which pervades the whole? to His supreme authority who is the sole Arbiter of all events, the Creator and

work of an hour or a day, but the labour of a long life. For there is not a law of nature, or a scene of Providence, scarcely an event or object in it, but speaks at once both of the Creator and Ruler of the world, and declares that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.— Many of the arguments that might be employed upon this occasion are so obvious, that if you are at all capable of reflection, or even of observation, you will not need any assistance from another. You will form them for yourselves. They lie so ready, and they are so plain, that if you can apprehend them when they are proposed, your own thoughts will anticipate the very mention of them.

IT often happens, and indeed in matters of practical religion it ordinarily happens, that the most obvious are the most striking arguments; all that is necessary for conviction is what hardly needs to be either suggested or

Governor of the boundless universe, “in whom we live, and move, and have our being?”—A truth which, above all others, has the most powerful efficacy to sober the mind; to strengthen it against the power of temptation; to create in it such a salutary awe of the boundless grandeur, such a lively sense of the infinite goodness of God, as can hardly fail of terminating in that entire devotedness to his will, which is the surest foundation of hope and comfort in this life, and the only means of finally attaining to glory, honour, and immortality, in the never-ending scenes that lie beyond it. EDITOR.

illustrated. We shall not therefore dwell on these, but from among many proofs of the divine government, shall select the following, just to propose them to your meditation.

1. THE government and providence of God might be inferred probably from the consideration of his natural perfections. God is a Spirit, and almost every idea we can form of an uncreated and immortal Spirit, includes in it some notion of activity; and is it reasonable then to believe, contrary to our best ideas of his nature, that God, whose operations might be exerted with so much advantage to so many worlds, and without any violence or difficulty to himself, should suffer his perfections to lie dormant, and possess all power, as if in reality he possessed none? And if this be not reasonable to believe, it is then reasonable to conclude, that he interests himself in the affairs of the universe; that as all things are subject to his control, so his government is actually exercised over all things; for whereon could his power be exerted but on these? Absolutely perfect as he is, they could find no employment on himself.

AGAIN: God who is a Spirit is also an omnipresent Spirit: he is every where: how he exists every where it is difficult to conceive;

and it is absolutely unnecessary for our present purpose to take any notice of the different notions that may be formed concerning this divine perfection. When we say that God is every where present, what we affirm is in plain language this ; that at one and the same time he perceives what is and happens every where ; and that at one and the same time he can every where exert all his powers ; and if this be true of God, does it not afford us a very probable presumption of his providence and government ? If, through the necessity of his nature, he is every where present, if it does not depend upon his will, whether or no he shall know what is, or whatever happens through the universe, if he cannot but be present in every point of space, through every region of immensity, how justly do we conclude from hence that all things are according to his will, and that if he perceives they be not, he will make them so ?

THIS inference, it would seem, cannot be refused but upon one or other of these two principles ; either that God has no will at all with respect to other beings ; that all things that regard them are perfectly indifferent to him ; that every state of the universe is alike good, not one more acceptable than another ; or, that if at any time it be in a state that is

not according to his will, he sees it and permits it, with the power of correcting it in his hand: principles, of which it is hard to say whether of the two is most unreasonable and absurd.

IF then, to avoid one or other of these errors, it must be admitted, that all things are according to his will, that if he perceive they be not, he will make them so, we have here a complete notion of the divine government and providence, deduced, as you have seen, from the consideration of his universal presence: if you add that of his perfect goodness, and consider how much the happiness of all sensible beings may be affected by this or the other state of things; by one promoted and secured, by another endangered and impaired; insomuch that in fact, scarce any change can take place by which it is not in some measure influenced, the argument will acquire new strength: and it will appear still more probable, if God knows all things, and can do all things, and wishes well unto the world; that the state of the world is at all times such as he judges to be for that season best; or, that if otherwise it would not be so, he will make it such.

IN the same manner we might argue from the divine wisdom in connexion with his

universal presence. For if God have a perfect knowledge of the world, and almighty power over it, and any designs to accomplish in it, (which you must suppose if you suppose him to be wise, for the proof of his wisdom depends upon the appearance of such designs,) if these things be so, then you must either charge God with such dishonourable inconsistencies as are never found in men, who are always careful to promote their designs according to their ability, or you must admit that the state of the world always is, or will be made such, as best corresponds with the divine purposes and intention. So that the will of God will be promoted either by the natural progress of things, (whether proceeding from himself and derived from his appointment, or not, is of no consequence in the present argument,) or, if not thus accomplished, will be effected by his interposition and control.

HENCE then you see, from the consideration of the divine perfections, arises a very credible proof, that all things proceed according to the divine will, or under the divine control, i. e. a proof of the providence and government of God.

2. AGAIN: the relation which he bears to the world, as the Creator and Father of it,

affords still farther evidence of the providence and government of God.

“ OF old did he lay the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of his hands; he made us and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.” It is the voice of reason as well as the testimony of Scripture, that every being in the universe derived its origin from some great, intelligent, and absolutely perfect Being, who is himself without derivation, without beginning of days, and without end of time. Every nature therefore is what God made it, subject to no influence to which he did not make it subject, and exposed to no changes to which he did not expose it. It was he who at first created the system of the universe, and appointed to its various parts their correspondences, their relations and connexions; and if these be the effects of his will, such also must every thing be that results from them. Deriving from him its being and its powers, every creature must necessarily be dependant upon him for the continuance of that being, and the retention of those powers.

FOR, you must suppose either that every being was constituted in such a manner as to continue of itself as it were, for such a period as may be thought proper to be prescribed to

it, or placed in such circumstances and connexions as should produce the same effect; or, on the other hand, that the same power which was at first exerted to create, is yet continually exerted to preserve the beings created in existence. On either of these suppositions you evidently put every thing into the hands of God, and acknowledge that nothing comes to pass but what either proceeds from his appointment and his agency, or is subject to his direction and control.

BUT again: on the same principles you may form another argument for the divine providence, and it is this. God, you say, is the Creator of the universe; and unless you can suppose your Creator to be less intelligent and rational than the creatures he has formed, you must suppose that he had some motive to such an exertion of his power, some end for which he created it; that he did not make the worlds merely for the sake of making them: now specify what end you please, take what you will to be the principle of the divine creation, you will find that the same principle will give you good assurance of the divine providence, and care over all his works.

DID he make the universe for the pleasure of beholding so beautiful a fabric? Will not the same principle induce him to maintain its

being and its beauty? Did he make it to display his knowledge to those intelligences whom he had formed after the image of his own understanding? Would not the same principle induce him to maintain them in their being and intelligence, and also to maintain his other works in their order and perfection, that he might still continue glorious in their eyes?

Do you more justly and rationally suppose that he made the world from a principle of love, his sensible creation to be happy, and the inanimate to contribute to their happiness? And can you then suppose that his benevolence was powerful enough to engage him in the production, but not powerful enough to engage him in the government of his creatures? Could he create them to make them happy, and abandon them after he had brought them into being, without any care or provision for their welfare? If this was the principle upon which he made it, must it not also lead him to assume the government of the world, and to consult the happiness of his creatures in every successive moment of their being, as well as in the first?

Is the human artist so reasonably solicitous for the preservation and good order of his works, and are the works of God unworthy of

their maker's attention? The great machine of nature, will it justify no provision, no care? Ye fathers, are ye so watchful over your children, so studious to preserve them from evil, so anxious to ensure their future happiness as well as their present comforts? do you place these things among your obligations? do you rank them among the excellences of your character? do you in this approve your conduct, and find your satisfaction? and can you then believe that God, the Father of angels and of men, the Almighty Parent of the universe, has no care over his children? Has he no concern for their interest? Makes he no provision for their welfare? Is he totally indifferent about their characters and their circumstances, and having (what you may perhaps have sometimes vainly wished, for the sake of your descendants, that you had) all power in his hands, has he cast off his children, and abandoned them to time and chance?

IF, either, in the first constitution of the world, he has provided for the regular and useful operation of material and inanimate causes, and for the welfare of his sensible creation according to their respective natures, characters, dispositions, and situation; if he has so ordered the progress of events as

to produce the best final issue, and in the mean time the greatest general felicity; or, if not having established such an order and series of events at first, he governs the world by a constant superintendence and unremitted agency, actuating, guiding, and over-ruling all things, to the gracious purposes of his own benevolence; he maintains the character of a wise Creator and a tender Father. If we deny this doctrine, we must assert, both irreverently and absurdly, that there are some of his creatures whose excellences reproach their Creator's character, that he might learn a lesson of wisdom and of goodness from his works.

THE arguments that have been now mentioned, may perhaps avail to convince you, that such a providence and government is exercised in fact, though they leave the manner in which it is exercised, undiscovered.— On this occasion we only reason on such principles as Christ assumed upon a like occasion, when he said unto his hearers, “ If ye
 “ being evil know how to give good gifts
 “ unto your children, how much more shall
 “ your heavenly Father give good things un-
 “ to them that ask him ?”

UNDER this head, as in some measure related to that argument in proof of the divine

government, which arises from the consideration of the character of God as the Creator of the world, from whom every being derived its nature, its properties and powers, I may be allowed just to mention, that upon the true principles of natural knowledge it appears, that the great bond by which the material world is held together, through which the heavenly bodies perform their respective revolutions, and retain their places and their courses; that, through which also all the revolutions of the earth are performed, through which it is a comfortable and a fruitful habitation; that, through which all its changes are effected, and by which its various parts are rendered the proper subject of human skill and industry, is not a property but a force; not inherent, but impressed; not a quality that belongs to the bodies we possess, or resides in those that we behold around us, but the effect of an uniform and unremitted operation of some almighty and omnipresent Being upon every system and every particle of matter in the universe.

SINCE this is so; since whatever comes to pass in the external, the material world, comes to pass by the immediate agency of God; it is clear, first of all, that the dominion of all things inanimate is his; and if you will

add to this consideration what your own experience and observation may have taught you concerning the intimate connexion that there is between the material world on the one hand, and on the other hand the spiritual, the sensible, the intellectual and moral worlds; if you will consider what mighty changes may be wrought in yourselves with respect to your sensations of ease and pain, with respect to the perceptions of your understandings, with respect to the affections of your hearts, with respect to your powers of every kind, and even with respect to your continuance in the world, by a very little change in the disposition of a very few particles of matter, by a very small acceleration of their motion, or as small a diminution of it; if you will consider what mighty consequences depend upon the views, the dispositions, and the lives of men; you will be ready to conclude, that whoever has the government of the material, must also have the government of the spiritual world; that one naturally accompanies the other; and that both centre in the God who made them. For the present to conclude:

THOSE perfections and relations of God which yield us such cogent evidence that he actually superintends and governs universal nature, do at the same time afford us the most

comfortable assurances that he is well qualified for so great and arduous a work. Who is better qualified to superintend your interests and dispose of your affairs? Not you. Neither your presence nor your power extend to every person and to every event in which your happiness is interested; nor is your wisdom in any one instance capable of discerning how any event, whether prosperous or adverse, will affect your interests upon the whole.

WHAT an argument is here to renounce all confidence in ourselves, and to cast our cares on God! Of whom should you make a friend but of God? If he be our friend, we cannot have, either in the animate or inanimate creation, one real enemy. And how shall we make a friend of God but by an habitual obedience to his commandments, and an universal resignation to his will? That obedience and that resignation is no very easy acquisition; it will cost you much labour and much time. The sooner you begin, the sooner you will attain to it; and attain to it you must, if you wish either for peace in this world, or for happiness in that which is to come.

YOUNG man, while thy heart is tender; while it is not yet made callous either by the vices and dissipations, or the interests and cares of this world, cultivate the sacred senti-

ments of piety ; give all diligence, that thy heart may delight itself in the law of God, and that thy will may be totally, universally, and cheerfully absorbed in his. I cannot give you better counsel either for this life or the next. If there be truth in God, it will insure to you a blessed immortality ; and if you dare trust my testimony, it will enable you perfectly to enjoy the prosperities of life, and sincerely to rejoice even amidst its apprehensions and afflictions. What is there beside that can do these great things for you? Nothing.

DISCOURSE NINTH.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS,
WHEN THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT ?*

IN the progress of our Discourse upon these words, having first explained to you what appeared to me to be the true idea of the government and providence of God, I come at length to state to you some of those considerations from which the providence and government of God receives its credibility. Here, having previously shown the necessity and the advantage of attending to such considerations, we observed,

1st, **THAT** the providence and government of God might probably be inferred from his natural perfections,

2dly, **FROM** the relations that he bears unto the world as the Creator and the Father of it, and I propose now to show, in the

3d place, **THAT** the very being of a revela-

tion, abstracted from any thing it teaches on this subject, is itself a proof of the Divine providence and government.

CONSIDER what a revelation is. It is an interposition of God to impart unto his intelligent creatures something respecting either their present or their future interest, which could not have been attained by them, or not in the necessary degrees of light and power, through the mere force of their natural abilities.

Now let the end of it be what it will, a divine interposition is a certain proof that the affairs of men are not overlooked by their Creator, or excluded from his care. It is an indisputable argument that he knows them; that he observes them; that he prefers one situation of them to another; and thinks it not beneath him, but worthy of his perfections, and of the relations that he bears to his creatures, to afford them, when they need it, better aids than those with which it was wise and fit they should originally and generally be entrusted.

BUT besides that he is attentive to the affairs of men, and interests himself in their welfare, a revelation likewise proves, that the God who made us has it in his power to bless us in whatever measure seemeth to him good;

that our natural abilities impose no restraints on his beneficence, and consequently, that if what we call nature be not in one instance, it is not in any instance inviolable, or unsurpassable by God; i. e. in other words, that he has all the powers of nature in his hands; that when such is his pleasure, he can do greater things than any that he has done in the constitution, or the course of nature; i. e. whatever seemeth to him good.

IF moreover we consider, that every revelation must appeal to miracles as its credentials, (since no reasonableness, no excellence, no importance, no expediency of a doctrine, as we have seen, can prove it to be an immediate communication from on high,) if we consider this, we shall not wonder that the very being of a revelation is mentioned as an argument of the divine providence and government; since, if it be a revelation that is credible, that is worthy to be received, it must have been introduced, or accompanied by those events which will demonstrate the Author of them to have it in his power to reverse, to counteract, or to suspend whatever is most certain, most stable, and most to be depended on in nature; i. e. to have the

absolute and uncontrollable government of the world.

IF the subject of this revelation, the intelligence that is by it communicated to mankind, be merely what respects the comfort or the present happiness of mankind, together with the government of God, it will demonstrate his benignity and goodness; if it be what respects their moral dignity, or their happiness, as connected with their moral character, it will at the same time demonstrate both the natural and the moral government of God.

CONSIDER then what evidence ariseth from the Christian revelation to the doctrine we would establish. It is confirmed by many signs and wonders with which God could not have borne his testimony to it, if the laws of nature had been any thing but his own volitions. The subject of it is the happiness of mankind in the practice and pursuit of virtue. And what can be a stronger argument of the moral government of God, of his inviolable resolution to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, than, that he violated the laws of nature, those laws, the general prevalence of which was necessary not merely to the well-being, but even to the very existence of his creatures,

in order to give evidence, and to procure attention to what the Gospel has to depose on a subject so interesting both to the happiness of man, and to the honour of his Maker?

4. THESE observations on the evidence that arises from the being of a revelation to the government of God, naturally lead us to observe concerning prophecy, that this also may be adduced in support of the same doctrine.

PROPHECY is a kind of miracle; whatever therefore was just now said under the preceding head of miracle, may be applied to prophecy. Prophecy moreover is a species of revelation; whatever therefore was said under the preceding head concerning revelation, may be applied to prophecy. But to consider what is peculiar in it; it must proceed, as was observed in the second of these Discourses, either from the perfect knowledge of all nature, so that he who dictates the prediction shall have infallible assurance that all things will work together to bring about the event he has foretold, and that nothing can intervene to obstruct the event he has predicted, or to change even the minutest of its circumstances; or, it must proceed from the consciousness that all things are under his

dominion; that nothing can come to pass contrary to his pleasure, or without his order; that he can do whatever he pleases in heaven above, and upon earth beneath; and that he cannot see cause to change his purpose, or to repent him of his will. On either of these suppositions, one single circumstantial prophecy, be the subject of it what it will, perfectly accomplished in the event, affords a very convincing argument of the providence and government of God.

If you suppose that no other account can be given of his foreknowledge of the event predicted, than that he had determined that it should be so, the conclusion is very plain that he has the government of the world in his hands. If, on the other hand, you suppose that he foresaw, from the perfect knowledge that he had of all things that were then existing, of their operations, their connexions, and their consequences, that the event predicted would be the natural result of them, and that nothing, neither will, nor power, would intervene to defeat his expectations: this extensive knowledge is evidently of such a nature as could be possessed by none but him who had imparted unto every being in the universe their respective powers; appointed them their connexions, and blended

them together in such a manner as to have provided for the event predicted, from the foundation of the world.

To know the universe so perfectly, can belong to none but to the Creator of it: nor could even the Creator of the universe infallibly foretel what should be hereafter, if he did not either exercise a constant superintendency and agency in the world, or had not from the beginning, in the original constitution of his creatures, and the distribution of their talents, in the appointment of their connexions, in the general disposition of all things, animate and inanimate, provided for every event, and appointed unto each its time, and all its circumstances.

THUS you see, that on any supposition, a prediction proves that God is not inattentive to the world and its affairs; proves, that his power is exerted in the management of the universe: and therefore will, one way or other, turn out an argument of the divine government; either in the way of constant agency and superintendence, or, in that which is, though not more strictly, more literally, a providence.

CONSIDER then, what striking evidences, what numerous proofs we have of this important truth; think how they multiply upon

us in that long series of prophecies which began in early times, and extend to very distant generations, and have been, from age to age receiving, according to their respective periods, an exact accomplishment.

CONSIDER how various are the subjects of these prophecies; sometimes the affairs of individuals, sometimes of families; sometimes of kingdoms, sometimes of the world; and you will see, that the government of God extends to the minutest as well as to the greatest affairs of his creation; and that there is no ground for that unmeaning distinction between a general and a particular providence. For, as no providence can be general that includes not every particular being, so the arguments by which we prove the government of God at all, prove, that he attends to the affairs of all his creatures, and rules over every individual.

CONSIDER again the connexion that subsists between the prophecies of which I have been speaking; observe how they are united in one series, and constitute one mighty whole, and you will perceive, that the government of God is constant and uninterrupted: reflect on their vast extent, the amazing period through which they stretch, and you will see, that the government of God is from

everlasting to everlasting. On this part of my discourse I shall only add, in the

5th and last place; THAT in proof of the Divine Providence and government, we may appeal to many striking facts that manifest the wisest and the kindest purposes, as well as to the general good order of the world.

I MIGHT here produce, both from sacred and civil history, both from public and from private life, many very important events that have been brought about by the most inconsiderable means; many, that have, in fact, followed as their consequence from those things on which they seem to have no manner of dependance, or even the least connexion with them; and many, which must be acknowledged in human apprehension, to have been directly contrary to the natural tendency of what we call their causes; the very reverse of what reasonably might have been, and of what actually was expected from them. In these things we must own the hand of God; his providence and agency is necessary to the solution of them. I shall not stay to specify any of these instances; this would be altogether unnecessary to those who have the history of providence in their hands, and it is fit that I should not neglect to mention to you what occurs within yourselves, and

within your own observation, to demonstrate that God interests himself in the present welfare of his creatures, and is not unconcerned about their welfare in futurity.

WHENCE is it, I pray, that the ant, whom you will not, I suppose, suspect to be possessed of a prophetic spirit; whence is it, that without any foresight of her own, she provideth her meat in the summer and gathereth her food in the harvest? you see no guide, or overseer, or ruler, that she has; but can you account for this, if God be not her ruler, her overseer, and guide? whence comes this provident disposition, but thence whence her being comes! And can any thing be a clearer proof that God abandons not his creatures, but extends his care over them not only to their present comfort, but also to their future happiness? Is not this as indisputable an argument of Divine providence, as if God, by miraculous interposition, should annually send an angel from on high, to lay up in store for this industrious people a provision for their future wants?

WHENCE is it that the stork in the heavens knows her appointed time; that the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming? that is to say, How are they warned to flee from those inclement

seasons that are not yet arrived? How is their course directed to a milder sky? How do they judge so nicely when the period of their sojourning is elapsed? Or by what principle is it that when that period is elapsed, they assemble for their flight from every quarter of the heavens? Have they, how can they have, any other pilot, or any other monitor, than God! Whence these changes but from the divine appointment? How but under the divine direction? Why these changes, if it were indifferent to God whether his sensible creation were preserved or perished? if it were indifferent to him, whether they prolonged their being in comfort or in misery?

SIMILAR to these are the powers of foresight and anticipation in yourselves, by which you are so much interested in futurity, that it is almost always in the present moment, one chief object of your thought and care. What mean these powers? What do they say to you of your Creator? Do they bespeak him to be careless of his works? To exercise no government, no providence over his creation? Do they declare him to be utterly unconcerned about his offspring and their affairs?

If the present blessings of his sensible creation could be ascribed to chance or fate;

i. e. if, in other words, the present happiness of his sensible creation, at any time, were not to be imputed to a benevolent and intelligent Principle as its author, yet foresight, as it implies intelligence in its possessor, must imply intelligence in its bestower, or its cause ; and a provision for futurity, by whatever means, together with the principle through which that provision for futurity is made, must be imputed to a Being who is at once both wise and kind, who knows what is to come hereafter, and means to make it welcome to his subjects.

THOUGH our present circumstances at any time might possibly be imputed to some other principle than kindness to ourselves, and might be necessary for other reasons than for our happiness, yet surely, our ability to enjoy them in the midst of so many dangers, and after having passed through so many circumstances that might have deprived us of that capacity, is an argument of the benignity of our Creator ; and, at the same time, the concern and the solicitude which he has implanted in us with respect to our interests in futurity, is as strong an argument of his care over us, and his determination to provide for our happiness in all that is yet to come.

CONSIDER, what a variety of circumstances, both within itself and the world around it, must concur together for the preservation of every individual animal upon the face of the earth, and then doubt, whether God be their preserver. Consider how one generation succeeds another; how, as one passes away in every species of creatures, another rises up to supply its place in the general system of the world, and to enjoy those bounties of which its predecessors, through a longer continuance of their existence, might have lost all relish: consider, that no species of being is extinct, but all continue as they were from the beginning; their nature perfectly the same in the latest and in the earliest generations; and then say, by whom the species is preserved, through so long a succession of innumerable individuals?

WHENCE come these regular and uninterrupted supplies? Whence is it, that though the earth be ever losing its inhabitants, yet its inhabitants are not diminished? These are all instances in fact, to which others need not to be added, of a provision for futurity plainly proceeding from the same Being who is the author of nature, and which demonstrate his care over his works. Instances of such a care, in which the means

employed for that provision have for successive ages proved effectual, therefore demonstrate that his power is exerted for the benefit of his creatures.

CONSIDER, how summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, day and night, fail not; then ask, is there no providence in respect to the comfort and support of life? Consider, what remedies are provided in every province of nature, for our diseases and our pains, and then ask, Is there no providence with respect to sickness and to health? Consider, how the numbers of mankind ordinarily continue much the same, and then ask, Is there no providence with respect to life and death? Consider of what importance it is to the happiness of society, that the powers of individuals should be variously dispensed and variously combined: consider that in fact they are so, and then ask, Is there no providence with respect to the distribution of our talents? Consider also, of what importance it is to mankind, that the circumstances of individuals should likewise be as varied as their powers: consider how much these circumstances depend upon their powers, and how much upon their industrious exertion or indolent neglect of them, and then say, Is there

no providence with respect to riches and honour?

CONSIDER, how much the inclinations and tempers of mankind depend upon the circumstances of their external situation: consider of what moment it is that such a variety of tempers should be mingled together in a scene of discipline and education: consider that the fact also is so, and then say, Is there no providence with respect to the natural dispositions of mankind? Consider how odious and how bitter are the fruits of vice; how pleasant and how fair are the fruits of virtue; and then say, Is there no providence with respect to human characters, no moral government of God? Consider how invariable are these laws; consider what mighty changes may be wrought in the tempers and the characters of men by well-appointed and well-timed changes in their circumstances, and then say, if there be no connexion between the natural and the moral worlds, no providence regulating the circumstances of mankind, and accommodating their state unto their characters:

IF the good order of the world, in the first moment of its existence were, as undoubtedly it was, a good argument of its being the work of an almighty, all-wise, and all-

gracious God, the preservation of that good order surely will be as good an argument of his providence and government? If its good order, for a moment, could not be the effect of chance, can the continuance of that good order be the result of accident? If its good order, for a moment, justly infers the will of some absolutely perfect Being, can that order be continued against the will of that Being? can it be maintained without it? If in one case the proof be good, it is good in the other also. Some account must be given of the constancy as well as of the origin of that good order, and no account can be given of it, but that it is the will of God.

To conclude: needs there any other argument to give you full conviction that God is the only Potentate? That he does according to his will in heaven above, and upon earth beneath? I am well persuaded there does not. Would to God that I had as firm and lively a persuasion that there needs nothing more to bring your temper and your conduct into perfect correspondence with this first great and fundamental principle of religion: nothing more should be needful. By nature you are reasonable creatures, and by profession you are disciples of Jesus Christ. Remember then that God is every where, that he knows

every thing, and can do every thing; there is nothing that he cannot accomplish; there is nothing which he cannot prevent. He is above you, and below you, and around you, and within you: he is where no human eye can penetrate, he is within your hearts.

IF this solemn truth were permitted by you to sink as deep as it ought to sink within your breasts, would you still be in every respect, would you still do in every instance, what now you allow yourselves to do and be? In this house of God your attendance surely would not be formal, would not be careless, would not be drowsy; would not be interrupted by the vain imaginations of your own minds, or by any trivial occurrence that may chance to strike your eyes or your ears.

WHEN you leave this house of God, his day would not be spent by you in trivial conversation, or in secular amusements, or in temporal affairs. Your diligence in the great work of life would every day be animated by the consideration of his presence and his providence. Your pleasure, though restrained by this consideration within narrower boundaries, it may be, than the fashions and the customs of a luxurious and dissipated age prescribe to them, would not be the less, but the more lively; would not be the less, but

the more perfectly enjoyed. You would be pure in heart; you would be holy in all manner of conversation; your whole life, your business, your amusements, your most trivial thoughts and actions would be an acceptable sacrifice to God, and every day spent by you under a serious sense of his inspection and dominion, would transmit you, gradually improving in every thing truly amiable, to that last solemn day beyond which this world cannot be enjoyed by you, but in which, if you have been affected as you ought to be, by the providence and government of God, you will be translated from this scene of ignorance and imperfection to his celestial presence, where, "there is fulness of joy, and to his right-hand, where there are pleasures for evermore." There, my friends, let us give all diligence to secure a happy meeting; there is no favour that I will ever ask of you with greater seriousness. No man can form a nobler purpose for himself, or entertain a kinder wish for you.

DISCOURSE TENTH.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS, WHEN
THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT ?*

TO what has been already said under this general head of our Discourse, we may add the express testimony of divine revelation.— Let us here then take a brief survey of the doctrine of the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures concerning the providence and the government of God.

As they ascribe the origin of all things to his creating power, so they represent him, during the early ages of the world, when as yet experience had not taught mankind to regard the uncorrupted dictates of their own hearts as the laws of their Creator, or the frame of nature as conveying to them the knowledge of his perfections, and the notices of his will; when as yet, through their inexperience, they were naturally ignorant of many things too important to their comfort, too necessary to the purposes of God in re-

spect to themselves, that they should remain in ignorance of them; during this infancy of the world and its inhabitants, the Scriptures represent the great Creator as maintaining the government of the external world in the same manner in which it is now maintained, but as ruling the race of men very much by visible intercourses and audible communications of his pleasure. All the operations of nature, and all the changes and events of life, are uniformly ascribed to the power and the will of the Creator; and even, whatever effects follow the will of men, are imputed to the providence of God.

WHEN a greater refinement of conception, a greater strength of reason, a greater compass of experience had superseded the necessity of those supernatural communications by which they were greatly aided, and in part acquired; that visible and audible intercourse with God seems gradually to have ceased; he seems to have ruled mankind, not so much by extraordinary interpositions, as by the principles of their own nature, by the power of external circumstances, and the influence they naturally have in various situations one over another.*

* It may be remarked here, that a very striking argument, in favour of the reality of the miracles wrought in the early ages of

ONE peculiar people, in process of time, by a train of very wonderful, yet not altogether supernatural, events, descended from a few illustrious ancestors, and increased into a nation in a foreign country, sinking eventually into slaves and bondmen, and therefore willing to be led in quest of another settlement, was selected from among all the nations of the earth to give to the rest of the world, in the whole of their history and fate, a sensible and striking example of the moral

the Jewish history, may be deduced from this fact, that no miracles were ever pretended to be wrought after the Babylonish captivity till the time of Christ. Now if the miracles recorded in the more early periods were a deception, what should have hindered the renewal of similar deceptions after the building of the second temple? Will it be said, that by their captivity and subsequent slavery in Babylon, the people were become so enlightened that they could not be imposed upon? Such are not usually the effects of captivity and slavery. Will it be said, that it was no longer the interest of their leaders to impose upon them? Had then Ezra and Nehemiah no difficulties to encounter, no prejudices to overcome? Would the belief of a divine interposition in their favour have done nothing towards establishing their characters, and giving them weight with the people? Admit the fact, that the former miracles were real, and that the providence of God saw fit, at that time, to withhold an interposition of this kind, and the difficulty is not only solved, but a far greater weight of evidence is thrown into the scale at this day, in favour of those miracles which were really genuine. EDITOR.

government of God in the instance of national remuneration in this world for ritual obedience to a prescribed law, and to be the depositaries of that doctrine, and of those predictions, that were to prepare the way for the Messiah, and to give evidence to his Gospel.

By their long peregrination in the wilderness, their detachment from all other nations was completed; and that attachment to one another, that idea of their own importance, which, in themselves considered, are vain, and selfish, and unamiable, but which, if considered in comparison with the corruption of all other nations, (by communication with whom the purposes of Providence must have been defeated,) are wise and admirable, were completely formed; and were strengthened by an extraordinary system of laws, derived from God, of the same alienating tendency, as well as by frequent miracles wrought in behalf of this people, and by constant wonders and tokens of the divine presence accompanying them.

AMONG this nation, as well as occasionally among other nations, for a long succession of ages, the government of God was in part carried on, and his designs accomplished, by the ministry of prophets, to whom he com-

municated his will “ at sundry times, and “ in divers manners.” But this instrument of the divine government among men seems, for a long time before the appearance of the Messiah, to have been totally disused, and all the will of God with respect to his rational offspring to have proceeded in what, for distinction sake, we may call its natural order and method.

IN the fulness of time, he, who from early ages had been foretold, (a prediction, which through successive times was frequently repeated,) as the deliverer of the Jews from the bondage of their peculiar ceremonies and ritual observances, appeared at once to put an end to that dispensation; and, by the power of his example, of his precepts, of his doctrine, of his prophecies, of the superior evidence that he gave to some important principles of conduct, and the discovery of others, which either had not been at all revealed, or but obscurely intimated in the preceding dispensations of religion; to bring mankind into a more perfect subjection to the moral government of God than they ever yet had paid to it, and to form them into one great and glorious society, perfectly holy, and perfectly happy, to dwell for ever in the city of the living God.

THUS, as by the Jewish dispensation, mankind were taught the moral government of God in this world, illustrated by the history of that peculiar people, so, by the mission of Christ, his life, his resurrection and exaltation, they were taught, not only that they were to live after death, but, that then the moral government of God would be exercised in individual remuneration.

DURING the personal ministry of Christ on earth, the government of God proceeded as before, except, that for the evidence of his Father's presence with him, for the establishment of his own authority, and the confirmation of his doctrine, he had the power of controlling, in many instances, the settled laws of nature: except also, that the new principles which he imparted to mankind produced, according to the various tempers of those who heard them, or received them, some effects, which otherwise had not taken place in the moral government of God. When his ministry on earth was accomplished, for the reward of his obedience unto death, he was received into the presence of God, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; where, for the confirmation of what he had before taught, and to give certain evidence to his disciples, that he, their

Exemplar, had entered on his reward, he had all power committed to him both in heaven and on earth; i. e. he was enabled to work miracles from heaven, as on earth he had before wrought them, for the maintenance and propagation of truth and virtue among men.

As a further evidence of his exaltation, as the first exercise of his power, (so to speak) for the more perfect establishment, and the larger extension of God's moral kingdom among men, he communicated to those who had been his disciples upon earth the power of working such miracles as he himself had wrought; and every other power which nature had not given them, but which it was necessary to impart to them that they might be the witnesses of his resurrection to all nations, and tongues, and kindreds, and confirm the truth of it to men of all tempers and persuasions. Through these a wonderful change was, in a short time, wrought in the moral government of God. Many cruel, superstitious, and immoral practices, were abolished in many nations; many individuals were renewed in the spirit of their minds; their characters transformed from darkness unto light, from wicked and corrupt, to pure and holy. Out of the ruins of idolatry and vice, there

arose a rational and manly piety towards God, operating in all the sacred sentiments of awful fear, of ardent love, of humble resignation and steady confidence, as well as in all the duties of a cheerful and unreserved obedience; there arose, a tender and fervent charity towards one another, issuing in all the blessed affections, the kind expressions, and the useful deeds of meekness, humility, forbearance, candour, compassion, congratulation, mutual helpfulness, and disinterested liberality; there arose, a certain elevation, dignity, and spirituality of mind, that disdained a sensual happiness, that looked above a temporal felicity, that despised both the blandishments and the terrors of temptation; that aspired after the divine favour as its end, and the divine likeness as its glory. These are the genuine fruits of the spirit, the natural effects of an uncorrupted Gospel, clearly understood and cordially embraced. These are the effects which it did remarkably produce in the first periods of the church, while it was yet preached among those who had been born in the uncomfortable darkness of heathenism, or educated under the bondage of Jewish ceremonies and superstitions; while it was yet confirmed by signs and wonders, and carried about with

it the testimony of God in the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

THE Gospel has still the same salutary tendency, the same efficacy to deliver us from the pollutions of the world, and to make us partakers of the divine nature. The Gospel has still the same truth, the same credibility, the same evidence; for, though no miracles be at this day wrought in attestation of it, yet the miracles that anciently were wrought in proof of its divine origin, are come down to us well attested, and to these is now added the visible completion of several of its prophecies; and to the same efficacy, to the same credibility, I trust I may also add, that it has, at least in some degree, actually the same effects. Is there not a soul whose sins the terrors of the Gospel now restrains? Is there not a soul whose duties the promises of the Gospel now animate? Is there not one living monument of the power of Christianity? none who walk worthy of their holy vocation? none who are sanctified and comforted, and saved by the faith of Jesus? Yes, my brethren, you know there are. The Gospel, as it was at first, is at this day a very powerful instrument in the moral government of God; and if the fulfilment of its prophecies, the period of which is elapsed, can justify our faith in those

of which the period is not yet come, we are warranted to entertain the pleasing expectation of the more general, and more glorious triumphs of the truth, as it is in Jesus.

SUCH seems to be in general the idea which the Scriptures give us of the divine government with respect to this world of ours; of the progress, of the revolutions, the means and instruments of that government from its commencement to the present time: in which you will easily perceive, that they represent all the external events of life as proceeding from the will of God, and at the same time every thing that respects the moral character of man as proceeding from him also. There are moreover, both in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, besides what may be inferred from the history that they give us of divine providence, many peremptory and positive declarations upon this subject.

LET us, therefore, for a few moments, attend to what they teach us. You will find, if I mistake not, that whatever has been set before you concerning the divine government as the dictate of reason, is also the voice of revelation.

THUS, for example: Has it been observed to you that the greatest and minutest, the most trivial and important events of life, are

all alike the objects of divine notice, and the subjects of divine care? The Scriptures too declare that, as on the one hand “ he removeth kings, and setteth up kings,” and thus determineth the fate of nations; so, on the other hand, that “ the hairs of our heads are all numbered, and not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our heavenly Father.”— Has it been observed to you, that the preservation of every creature, as well as its existence, that its continuance in life, as well as its introduction into it, must be ascribed to God? The Scriptures too declare, that “ by him all things consist;” that “ he upholdeth all things by the word of his power;” that “ they continue unto this day according to his ordinances;” that “ he only, maketh us to dwell in safety;” that “ in his hand is the soul of every living thing;” that “ he preserveth both man and beast.” These things are to be considered as the testimony of God himself concerning his own government; and if you will not believe your Maker, to whom will you resign your faith?

HAVING so largely laid before you the proofs of the divine government, one of the first and most important doctrines of religion, both from reason and from Scripture, I might now proceed to the consideration of those things

which render it of such importance, viz. its influences upon the temper of the heart, and the conduct of the life. But this is too large a field to enter on at present; let me therefore rather exhort you to consider what you have heard; let the concurrence you have seen between the dictates of reason and the declarations of Scripture on this occasion, teach you to regard them as mutual friends that may avail themselves of each other's aid. Let it confirm your faith in that doctrine, in behalf of which they have both appeared; and since the efficacy of any doctrine upon your hearts, and upon your conduct, will ever be in proportion to the vivacity and the steadiness of your faith in it, let it induce you to cherish the belief of a doctrine at once so purifying and so consolatory, so important both to your comfort and your duty, by whatever thoughts may arise in your own mind in its behalf, and by every consideration with which the word of God may furnish you.

MAY the great disposer of events dispose your hearts to wisdom, and may the giver of every good and perfect gift, in all things, where either your enjoyment or your virtue is concerned, confirm and increase your faith. To this end may he give a blessing to the considerations that have now been laid before

you, and if they prove the means of enlivening your faith, pray ye that they may enliven his also through whom these things were suggested to you!

To conclude: since this joyful doctrine, that without God nothing comes to pass, is so clear a dictate both of nature and of revelation, it cannot surely be in your power to think honourably or even comfortably of yourselves, while you embrace not this doctrine; or, while embracing it, you admit not and cherish not its genuine influences on your hearts. While you neglect to do this, you are by no means your own friends, no friends to the excellence of your characters, no friends to the comfort of your lives. Believe ye that the Lord God Almighty reigneth? Think what they who believe this should be in respect of holiness. Think what they may be in respect of fortitude and peace.

AGAIN: the Gospel of Christ Jesus speaks nothing inconsistent with this language of nature and of reason; and it adds to their language, counsels and consolations, which they could not give. You are justified in receiving it; in rejecting it you could not be justified, for it is a doctrine worthy of all acceptance. As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him. Reason is a talent for

which you have to account; and the Gospel is another talent for which you have to account. That ye believe it, that ye understand it, this will not avail you, if you have not felt it in your hearts; if you have not habitually felt it there; if it has not influenced your lives; if it has not uniformly governed these, it will prove no blessing to you in the end; for, "if any man has not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his."—Take his gospel for your guide and for your comforter; whatever ye have found in former life, I will venture to predict that hereafter you will have need of it in both these characters. This is the language of reason; it is the language of experience too. Live with it at your hearts, and die with it in your hands; for I know no other ground of hope towards God, either for this life or for that which is to come, but a sincere and universal conformity to the doctrine and the image of his Son.

DISCOURSE ELEVENTH.



LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS, WHEN
THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT?*

I AM now about to enter on the practical application of what has been said to you on this subject; but previously it may be proper briefly to remind you of the observations we have made concerning the nature and the evidence of the providence and government of God. You have seen, under the first general head,

1. **THAT** what we call evil as well as good; i. e. the various modes of pain as well as of pleasure, proceed from God: it is the Lord's doing; the result of his will or of his appointment. It is not one being that pours out blessings on the world, and another that mingles evils with those blessings; both proceed from the same fountain, and flow together in the same stream.

2. **THOUGH** the sceptre of God extendeth unto all, and his providence is exercised over every creature, yet he rules every different species of beings by different laws, and governs all according to their respective natures; i. e. in proportion as God hath communicated to every class of beings the power of governing themselves, in that proportion his own immediate agency upon them is withdrawn, except so far as is necessary to preserve them in existence, to continue to them the exercise of their powers, to give efficacy to their volitions, or to control and regulate the effects of them.

3. As the government of God is exercised in a manner correspondent to the different nature of his different creatures, so it is also adapted to the various circumstances and tempers of individuals.

4. **THE** government of God, so far as it respects intelligent and voluntary beings, is, in part at least, carried on by the instrumentality of others.

5. **THE** government of God is carried on by general laws; i. e. as in human governments, the laws are a certain rule by which we may in general judge upon every occasion what will be the conduct of the governor

towards his subjects, so the government of God, both natural and moral, proceeds in that steady constant manner, that wherever the situation, circumstances, and character of his creatures are perfectly the same, we may confidently expect the same effects and consequences.

6. NOTWITHSTANDING that the government of God is ordinarily administered by the instrumentality of others, and ordinarily also according to general laws, yet this instrumentality and these laws are the result of God's will, and therefore exclude not the possibility, or the probability, that if any just occasion offers, he should act immediately by his own right-hand as it were, and suspend or counteract those laws by which he usually conducts his government.

7. WITH regard to all the practical consequences of this doctrine, with regard to all the influences which the consideration of the divine government ought to have, and would naturally have upon our temper and our conduct, it is a matter of perfect indifference whether we suppose with some, that every event takes place at the proper season, and in its appointed circumstances, in consequence of certain delegated powers united, blended, proportioned and adjusted to one another.

throughout all their successive operations in the first formation of the world, with infinite and incomprehensible wisdom ; or with others, that they proceed from the successive commands or operations of God, acting from time to time according to circumstances and emergences.

As to the evidence of the divine government, proposed under the second general head, you have seen that it may be inferred with great strength of reason,

1. FROM various natural perfections of the divine mind.

2. FROM the relations which God bears unto the world as the Creator and the Father of it.

3. THE very being of a revelation, abstracted from any thing it teaches on this head, is itself a proof of the divine providence and government.

4. ONE single circumstantial prophecy, verified and accomplished, affords a convincing argument of this; how much more that amazing series of prophecies which is contained in the sacred oracles of God.

MANY striking facts which manifest the wisest, and the kindest purposes, have been produced as bearing testimony to the government of God; and we have farther confirmed

this joyful truth from the general and perpetual good order of the world. And,

LAST of all, we subjoined a brief survey of the representation which revelation gives us of the government of God, and of the doctrine it has taught concerning it.

ALL the particular parts of this Discourse have been practically applied by us as we went along. I now proceed to the third general head, viz. to inquire what influence it ought to have upon our temper and our conduct, and this will lead to the general practical improvement of the whole.

IN the first place, how glorious an idea does this give us of the divine excellence and majesty!

How incomprehensible is the knowledge of God, from whom nothing is concealed in heaven or on earth, or under the earth; who overlooks not the situation of a single atom, or the rising of a single thought! He counts the host of heaven, and through an immeasurable extent of empire, calls all his subjects by their names. In one immense survey he beholds every creature, from the angel of his presence down even to the insect and the herb, and the dust we tread upon. The meanest individual of his kingdom is not unnoticed by him; or the meanest circum-

stance of the meanest individual. All hearts are open to him; all secrets are revealed to him: as to him there is no darkness and no mystery, so in him there is no ignorance, and for him there is no information. In every instant he discerns every motion and every thought, though they amount to myriads on myriads; and though in the instant that they are produced, they perish. As he discerns whatever is within us, or above us, or around us, or beneath us, as wide as immensity itself, without labour, without oversight, and without succession, easily, perfectly, and instantly; so he discerns whatever comes to pass throughout the universe, without error, without surprise, without confusion; clearly, calmly, and unweariedly accompanying, as it were, the universe, through its unceasing changes, comprehending all things with greater facility and certainty than the most enlarged mind he has created comprehends the smallest portion of his works; knowing even the most intelligent of his creatures more perfectly than they are known unto themselves.

SUCH is the knowledge which the great Ruler of the world must possess and exercise in the government of it: a knowledge so high, that we never can attain unto a just

conception of it; surpassing all our thoughts, and justifying all our wonder! Nor could the the government of the world be carried on, if this knowledge were not as wonderful in its application as it is incomprehensible in its extent. What prudence, what wisdom, is not necessary to maintain the order, the comfort, and the interests of a little kingdom, of a less society, yea, even of a family? what wisdom then is not needful to him who undertakes the government of the world? What wisdom must he not possess who maintains its good government uninterrupted and uncontrolled? What innumerable ends are there to be pursued in conjunction with one another, in a just subordination, and all in subserviency to one great end, the happiness of his subjects! What innumerable principles, not only different, but even opposite in their natures, are there to be directed in their operation, combined together in their just proportion, actuated to a certain degree, and within those limits made effectual; beyond them, to be counteracted and restrained! How many different species of creatures, how many different humours, how many different wills; what blind and impetuous passions, what perverse and froward dispositions, what an infinite variety of objects to be attended

to, and accommodated one to another! He who can reconcile, and control and regulate; he who, through all apparent disorders, can maintain the harmony of the world; he who, through all apparent evils, can promote its real interests, and raise out of what appears to our narrow minds a mighty chaos that confounds us and oppresses us, the fair fabric of universal happiness: how wonderful must he be in counsel, how abundant must he be in means! Where but in God is wisdom to be found! Where but in the world's great Governor, is the place of understanding!

BUT farther: however honourable the idea of the divine knowledge and wisdom which his government of the world suggests to us, his power is at least equally illustrated and magnified. How immensely strong must be that arm on which all nature leans: to which the clods of the valley, and the insects that inhabit them, and the brutes that tread those insects under foot, and the men that rule over the beasts of the field, and the angels that administer unto human interest, are all alike, and all equally indebted for their being, and their continuance in being. How inexhaustible and inconceivable is that fulness of power which operates upon every other being, and within them; from which all their

powers, like an infinity of little streams, are perpetually derived and supplied. What a force is that which impels the celestial bodies through their courses, which confines them each to its proper orbit, which gives to each its stability and solidity, which rolls every wave along, and fixes every sand upon the shore! How awful he who maketh darkness and it is night, who bids the sun arise and it is day; who giveth, in their season, seed time and harvest, and summer and winter; who raiseth out of the earth food both for man and beast; who fills every portion of the universe with various forms of life, with innumerable beings, fearfully and wonderfully made; who hideth his face and they are troubled; who taketh away their breath and they return unto their dust; who sendeth forth his Spirit and they are created; who prolongs, through infinite successions, the various tribes of living creatures, and who alternately blasts and renews the face of the earth! Who is there that hath an arm like God, or who can thunder with a voice like him? Who is there but the Lord, that when he looketh on the earth it trembleth, and when he toucheth the hills, they smoke? How amazing is that strength which collected the waters of the firmament, and broke

Open the fountains of the deep, and drowned the earth and its inhabitants in the deluge! How tremendous is that power which can set on fire the heavens, and melt the elements, and burn up the earth, and raise a new and better fabric out of its ruins! How incomprehensible is his dominion, who can turn the prosperity of the wicked to their destruction, and cause all things to work together to the righteous for their good; who, with equal ease, can pursue or suspend the laws of nature; can effectuate or defeat the purposes of others; can employ them for his instruments, or execute his will without their aid; without whom we are nothing, and can do nothing; in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways! With the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength; all power belongeth unto God; the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary: who in the heavens can be compared to the Lord, or who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto our God? From him, as from the fountain, comes all other knowledge; from him, as from the giver of every good and perfect gift, comes all other wisdom; from him, as from its source, proceeds all other power. He dispenses these in what manner and what measure it seemeth

to him good ; he worketh all things according to the counsels of his own will, and giveth not account of any of his matters. Glorious is the honour of his majesty, and his greatness is unsearchable ! No agents or advisers share with him the honour of his government ; for “ who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor ? ” His empire is not bounded by this mountain or by that sea ; his dominion is not limited within this age or period ; all kingdoms rise within his territories, and aggrandize his empire equally by their continuance, or their fall. All potentates are his tributaries—the meanest of their vassals are not more dependant on him. All nations are bound to come and worship before the Lord ; yea, all worlds to attend on the intimations of his pleasure. Angels, the host of heaven, the highest orders of the celestial host, thrones and principalities, and powers, do homage at his footstool ; for all that is in the heaven and on the earth is his ; all things serve him ; his, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty. From the world in which we live, to the heaven of heavens where he resides, all worlds obey him ; from the dust on which we tread, to the Seraphim that stand before his face, all creatures, willing or

unwilling, execute his purposes, and contribute to his glory; the living and the dead are both alike under his government. Unlimited and endless, his kingdom extends throughout immensity, and endures throughout all generations. "The Lord reigneth; let the earth tremble!"

2d, IF God be the great Ruler of the world, and governs it without interruption or control, of what infinite importance is his favour?

IF an earthly ruler be our friend, we reckon that all our civil interests are secure; but if God doth according to his pleasure, both in heaven and in earth, in this world and the next, his favour must be life, and his loving kindness must be even better than life. It must be of all things the most desirable, for it comprehends in it all things that are good. If his power could be controlled, if his will could be eluded, if his government could be interrupted, if any interest of ours lay without the reach of his sceptre and his influence, we might then occasionally hesitate concerning the importance of his favour, and deliberate whether at this season or in that circumstance we stood in need of it. But, at all seasons and in all circumstances being absolutely in his hands, holding our lives and

comforts at his pleasure, suffering only through his appointment, and prolonging our days in joy or in sorrow according to his will; capable, if he pleaseth, of immortal happiness, and liable, if he commands it, to everlasting destruction, unable to resist him, and unable to recommend ourselves to any who can maintain our interests against God, what is it that should be the first object of our anxiety, what is it that should be the constant subject of our concern, but that, without which we must be wretched; possessed of which, no enmity can hurt us, and no evil overwhelm or injure us? Would you that your friends should love you, make a friend of God; would you that their neglect, if they do neglect you, should be better to you than their love, make a friend of God; would you that your enemies should be at peace with you, be ye reconciled to Heaven; would you that their hatred should promote your interests, take care that you have an interest in God; would you prosper in the world, you cannot do it without his help. Say not, that your prosperity may be the result of the right and vigorous application of your own powers: ask yourselves from whom those powers are derived; by whom those powers are continued to you, and who it is that forms the con-

nexions and constitutes the conjunctures that are favourable to the right and successful application of your powers. Whatever are your views in life, you cannot attain them without God; and though he should assist you to attain them, yet still you cannot improve your real interests, you cannot enjoy them in unallayed comfort, without God. Would you that your souls should prosper? it must be through his blessing. Are you weary of affliction? there is no aid but in the divine compassion. Are you burdened with a load of guilt? there is no hope for you but in the divine mercy. Is your heart sad? your comfort must come from God. Is your soul rejoicing? God must prolong your joy, or, like the burning thorn, it will blaze and die. Does your unexperienced youth need to be directed? God must be your guide. Does your declining age need to be supported? God must be your strength. The vigour of your manly age will wither if God does not nourish and defend it; and even prosperity is a curse, if God does not give a heart to relish and enjoy it. All hearts, all powers, are his: seek ye then the Lord while he may be found; seek his favour with your whole souls; it is a blessing that will well reward all that you can sacrifice to purchase

it ; it is a blessing without which nothing else can bless you. His patience, though you are wicked, may perhaps, for a moment, suffer you to triumph, but do not thence conclude that you enjoy his favour. If a good conscience do not tell you so, believe no other witness ; for all the pleasures that you boast are but like the pleasures of a bright morning and a gaudy equipage to the malefactor going to his execution*. Every moment you are in jeopardy, and every moment may put an end to your triumphs, and transform your joys and hopes into desperate and helpless misery. It is but for God to leave you, and you are left by every thing you delight in, and abandoned to every thing you fear. It is but for God to will it so, and this night your reason shall forsake you, your health shall fail you, your friends on whom you lean shall fall, and your comforts, in which you are rejoicing, shall distress you. It is but for God to will it so, and this moment shall begin a series of perplexities, and fears, and griefs, which in this world shall never end. It is but for God to will it so, and this night thy soul shall be ejected from its earthly tabernacle, this night thy last pulse shall beat, and thy last breath

* Doddridge on the Care of the Soul.

expire, and thine eyes, for ever closed upon all thou hast loved upon earth, shall be opened upon all thou dreadst in heaven.

No, my brethren, there is not a moment's safety but in peace with God ; there is not a moment's solid comfort but in friendship with our Maker. In every season, and in every state of life, his favour is absolutely necessary to our happiness. What infatuation, then, has seized the sons of reason and of foresight, that they seek first what they fondly wish for, whatever it is that their hearts desire ; and purpose, if they purpose at all, afterwards to seek for that favour which alone can fulfil the desires of their heart, and without which their wishes never can be gratified !

LET the time past suffice you to have held so shameful, and absurd, and dangerous a conduct. Who in his senses would live at enmity with him who has all power in his hands ? Who, that pretends to reason, would delay a moment to secure his friendship if he might obtain it ? Give no sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eyelids, till you can congratulate yourselves that God is yours, and you are God's. Better had you sleep in the storm upon the precipice, than close your eyes till you have made peace with God. Dismissing then every other thought, suspending every

vain pursuit of this world, go cast yourselves at the footstool of your Maker, bewail your guilt, deprecate his anger, bind yourselves in an everlasting covenant to serve him and obey him; entreat his mercy for the past, and his grace for what is yet to come. Acknowledging in words the providence of God, let it also be acknowledged in works. Choose not your portion with the hypocrite; and if you are ashamed to be numbered with the unbelieving, let not your consciences condemn you, let not your own hearts convict you. Where all your interests are deposited, thither let all your cares be directed. Where all your dependence is, there be your first and your most perfect homage paid. Cultivate in your hearts a lively and abiding conviction of the importance of the divine favour; cherish in your souls the devoutest aspirations after it. While the many are crying out, "who will show us any good," say ye, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us," and that shall put more joy and gladness into our hearts than the greatest affluence of worldly possessions. Labour after it as the sum of human happiness, and pray for it as the completion of all you can desire. Study how you may, in all things, walk so as to please

God; "for when a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him," and then will the great Ruler of the world own you for his friends when ye do whatsoever he commands you.

DISCOURSE TWELFTH.



LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS,
WHEN THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT ?*

IN our practical reflections drawn from this subject, we have already observed,

1. **HOW** glorious an idea does this give of the divine excellence and majesty !

2. **THAT** if God be the great Ruler of the world, and governs it without interruption or control, every other good must be light in the balance compared with his favour. We come now to remark,

IN the third place, that if God be the Ruler of the world, and disposes all things according to his pleasure, how strongly does this justify, and how loudly does this call for all the duties and exercises of religion.

SHALL God reign over universal nature, and dispose all events for the benefit of his sub-

jects, and not a knee be bended at his footstool, not one act of reverence and adoration be presented at his throne? Would you forfeit the character of reason by such expressions of your reverence? Is it absurd and indefensible to signify your respect to those whom you acknowledge your superiors, and whose excellences you esteem among the children of men? Do the features of modesty, do the tokens of sensibility offend you? Does the mind that thinks humbly of itself disgust you, when, without affectation or impertinence, it reveals the sense it has of the excellency and the worth of others? When the inhabitants of heaven are described to you as standing before God, covering their faces with their wings, and crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is filled with his glory." When they ascribe "glory, and honour, and thanks to him that sitteth on the throne, and that liveth for ever and ever," do they appear to you erroneous? Do they appear to you contemptible? Are they doing what is weak to excite your pity, or what is wrong to provoke your indignation? The sentiments of your own hearts, for you are contemplating his sincere and humble worshippers, will supersede the necessity of any arguments to con-

vince you that it is meet, and fit, and laudable; that since God is the Creator and the Sovereign of the universe, the homage of his intelligent creation should not be withheld from him. “The praise of God should endure for ever.”

AGAIN: if God has all blessings in his hands, life and death, good and evil, at his disposal, is it undutiful, is it indecent, humbly to acknowledge our dependence upon him, and devoutly to pour out our hearts before him? If all the comforts in which we rejoice come down from God, if they be the fruit of his pure liberality and unwearied goodness, shall no sentiments of religion consecrate that joy? Shall we brutally be engrossed by the enjoyments, and not one grateful thought be directed to the giver? Would this diminish our delight in them? Would this sink us in his esteem? Would this defeat us of his future favours? If we have violated his laws who has a perfect right to give us laws, and has it in his power perfectly to vindicate their honour; is it becoming, is it honourable, is it ingenuous, is it prudent, to palliate that which can neither be justified nor concealed? to live for ever in the presence of God, as if we never had transgressed; to walk in his sight, and yet carefully to avoid, or obsti-

rately to withhold all tokens of repentance and all expressions of contrition? If God were not the Ruler of the world, if his laws did not bind us, if his bounty did not bless us, if our fate were not in his hands, upon these suppositions there would be a flagrant impropriety in addressing to him our prayers, our confessions, or our praise. But Lord as he is of universal nature, willing as he is to attend to your addresses, ready as he is to accept you in your approaches to him, requiring, as he does, that you shall ask of him what you would obtain, and refusing to bestow upon you the best blessings that you can receive, unless confiding in the duties of religion as the means and the condition of obtaining them, you implore them of him the Father of lights, whose promise is engaged to give good things unto them that ask him.

THINK ye, who carelessly, thoughtlessly, irreverently pass through life in the habitual neglect of religious worship, whose families never join in dutiful addresses to our common Lord and Father, whose closets, perhaps, never see you but when worldly business draws you thither; ye who causelessly forsake, or indolently attend on the public institutions of religion; consider seriously on what principles you will justify yourselves when,

for all these things, God shall call you into judgment.* Your own conduct will condemn you; by your own practices you will be con-

* It is exceedingly to be lamented that there should be persons who, upon the whole, in all the various relations of domestic and social life must be esteemed worthy and respectable characters, who are not occasionally, it may be, without devotional feelings, and are far from being speculative unbelievers, and who yet must be ranked in the class above described. They do not indeed resort to the coffee-house, the tavern, or the gaming-table; but their Sunday is regularly spent in occupations, if not so criminal, yet certainly in a manner not more appropriate—in settling their accounts perhaps, in travelling, in reading some work of imagination, or in writing letters of business. Alas! on what principle shall we account for this? Is the indisposition to social worship, and the total neglect of the sabbath, the effect of habit? The question occurs, How has a habit so contrary to the demands of duty, and so inimical to progressive improvement in virtue and piety, been originally formed? Did the neglect at first begin by observing that many who regularly attend the worship of the sanctuary, if not so openly profligate, are not less selfish and worldly-minded than others? Would you then maintain, that because there are those who are mere formalists who have no higher object than merely to appear religious, do not profit by their regular attendance on the public ordinances of religion, therefore those of happier temperament, whose motives are purer and their minds in a more healthy state, might not be exceedingly benefited by availing themselves of those religious institutions which are expressly ordained to correct this insensibility of spirit, and gradually to lead on from one degree of excellence to another? It were vain, however, to reason on a subject which rests not its decisions on the authority of reason.—But were it possible to

victed. You frown upon your children when they treat you with disrespect; you sometimes expect, that though you know their wants, they should ask your help; you expect that when they have received it, they should gratefully acknowledge it; mercifully as you are disposed towards them, you resent their obstinacy and insensibility if having been undutiful they remain unhumbled. Your superiors on earth, if you have any interest dependent on them, with what assiduity do you cultivate their favour; no token of respect is wanting; you reverence their presence, you thank them for what is past, you solicit what you want of them, you carefully excuse yourselves for every instance of neglect into which you have fallen, you cast yourselves on their candour, you are totally devoted to them, and grudge them no testimony of your esteem and your attachment; it may be that you even sacrifice your dignity to their vanity, and to recommend yourselves to

place before the eyes of these delinquents but a very small portion of the multiplied evils, in respect of others, which arise from their neglect, its baneful influence on their children, their servants, and their younger companions, there are surely many who would break asunder these bonds, whether of habit or prejudice, and who would nobly resolve in future, at whatever expense to their immediate feelings, to remove this "stumbling-block and lamentable rock of offence." EDITOR.

those from whom your expectations are, you become officious, flattering, and mean; yet who is there in the world to whom you owe such obligations as to God, or from whom you have such important expectations? Who is there that has done for you, what God did not put it both in their hearts and in their power to do for you? Or who is there that can serve you with any tokens of friendship which God must not work in them both to will and do? Who is your greatest, who is your ultimate benefactor? On whom do your most important interests depend? Who is it that is to decide concerning your condition in eternity? Is this true of those to whom you are so sincere, so assiduous, and so warm in your devotions? Did they give you being? Do they support you in existence? Have they all nature at their command? Is it true of them that your services can never exceed their merit or your duty? Is it true of them that you cannot stand in their sight when once they are angry? Let it not, my brethren, be your condemnation that you either prostitute to his creatures what you owe to God, or withhold from God what he has a right to claim from you. Learn wisdom of yourselves, and taught by your own conduct in other instances of obligation and de-

pendance, give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name.

4. If God be the Ruler of the world, and doeth whatever seemeth to him good, how terrible a consideration is it to the sinner, how comfortable a reflection is it to the righteous; how powerful an argument is it to a faithful, cheerful, and unreserved obedience?

CONSIDER, sinners, what you are, and what you are doing; you are rebels against the divine government, in a state of enmity with God, and while you continue in your impenitence, you are setting at defiance the Creator and the Ruler of the world: and who are you, that you dare provoke a quarrel with the Almighty? Who are you, that you dare contend with the living God? Know ye, ye rash, unfeeling mortals, how terrible a thing it is to fall into his hands? Know ye the means of escaping from his wrath; know ye the price that will redeem your souls? Can there be a more dreadful idea of an enemy, than, that he is immutable, almighty, and immortal? yet such is God to you, ye impenitent and unbelieving, while ye continue such, an inexorable, omnipotent, and everlasting enemy. Is it any comfort to you that all nature is at his command? that eternity, as well as time, is under his control? that the seen and un-

seen worlds are equally under his dominion? Is it any comfort to you that he can make your friendships to be your ruin? that he can convert your pleasure into your poison, and your security into a snare? Is it any comfort to you, that by your impunity at present he can increase your punishment? and by delaying its arrival, aggravate the misery that awaits you? Have you ever thought of the terrors of the Lord? Have you ever seriously set yourselves in the condition of that unhappy man who has finally resolved upon impenitence, and brought upon himself the last vial of divine indignation? If you have not, do it now. Think, then, that all the evils you can dread, and the evils of which the greatest temporal distress is scarce a shadow or an emblem, are absolutely in the power of God. He can collect together every stream of sorrow, and pour the dreadful deluge into your soul. He can distress you in your going out and in your coming in, in your rising and in your lying down. He can make your labour to be barrenness, your rest to be weariness, your hope to be disappointment, your joys to be bitterness, and all your sensations to be agony and anguish. Your being is in his hands, and if he will, he can prolong it in pure and perfect misery. Your body is in

his hands, and he can cast it into the fire that is not quenched; your soul is in his hands, and he can make all its ideas full of pain, and all its expectations full of horror. Life is his, and he can determine its circumstances as he pleases. Death is his, and he can sooth its pains with celestial comforts, or superadd unto them the most excruciating torments. In this life, it is but to speak the word and thou shalt be set forth a monument of eternal vengeance for the admonition of all who might be tempted to provoke the indignation of God.

BUT, though your plagues should be made wonderful, yet all that ends in death is as light as the dust of the balance in comparison of what begins there; for not the voice of thunder can represent the horrors of that voice, when too late repenting ye sue for mercy, and receive no answer, but “depart
“ye cursed:” nor can all the shrieks of a drowning or a burning world image to you the hopeless misery of its consequences! When the day of grace is over, when the patience of God is past, when your ruin is for ever sealed, what will it avail to wish that you had not bid defiance to the Lord of nature? What will it avail to wish that you rather had incurred the hatred of every created

being, for then you might have found a refuge and a deliverer in God? Have pity on yourselves, sinners, and do not wage so unequal and so dangerous a war. God reigns, and must reign : let the earth know, and fear, and tremble !

HAPPY they who entertain those reverent thoughts of God, and cultivate those pious dispositions towards him which lead them to the imitation of his character, and the obedience of his laws. In him they have a friend who is better to them than all other friendships ; for all hearts and all powers are his. Their God is the Lord of nature, and the ruler of the universe ; the author and disposer of all events. Were they themselves almighty, they would not be so happy, unless they were, at the same time, all-wise ; and if they were all-wise, they would at all times be what it is the will of God they should be ; i. e. what they are. Many other blessings they enjoy, which the wicked know not of. All nature is kindly disposed and over-ruled unto their good ; their good must of necessity be promoted, for “ the righteous Lord loveth
 “ righteousness, and his counsel standeth firm
 “ for ever, and the thoughts of his heart unto all
 “ generations.” Exceeding great and precious are the promises they are heirs to. Too great

for the language and conceptions of mortality to explain, but not too great for God to verify.

YE may indulge your sublimest wishes, ye children of God; ye may exercise the firmest faith, for your Father and your Friend who loves you, is Almighty. Nothing but his wisdom can limit his beneficence; nothing but your apostasy can defeat you of his promises. Through life he attends you with a shepherd's care, in death he will sustain you with a parent's pity, and after death will display to you all the glory and munificence of an all-bountiful Creator: "Rejoice then, in the Lord, ye righteous, for praise is comely for the upright." As our obedience promotes our joy, let our joy enliven our obedience; as we hope, ere long, to begin the better duties of a better world, let us do what we can to make a heaven of this earth. Let us exhort one another to obedience, and call upon one another to be glad, saying, praise our God all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent is King.— Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give honour to him that sitteth on the throne for ever and ever."

DISCOURSE THIRTEENTH.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS,
WHEN THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT?*

IN the progress of our practical remarks, we observed,

3. **THAT** if God disposes all things according to his pleasure, how strongly does this justify, and how loudly does this call for, all the duties and exercises of religion?

4. How terrible a consideration must the uncontrollable power of God be to the sinner, and how comfortable a reflection to the righteous.

WE come now to observe,

5. **THAT** if God be a great King over all the earth, then we, of whatever nation, tongue, or kindred, are all fellow subjects.

STRICTLY and properly there is but one King; we are all his vassals and his servants. Differing in name, in all essential circumstances we differ not at all; we are all the crea-

tures, and therefore we are all the subjects of the same great King; and whatever convulsions agitate the world, his kingdom cannot be moved. What is your family or mine? Nothing but collateral branches of the one great family of God. What is your rank in life, and what is mine? However the world may have distinguished them by the names of high and low, in reality, they are nothing but the offices which our common Father hath assigned us in his own great house. Let pride hear this, and be abashed; let modesty attend to it, and be comforted. Let all who are capable of just and humane affections yield their hearts unto its influences, and regard all mankind as the subjects of the same King, and the children of the same family. One day they will find that in the eye of God they were so, let them therefore regard the miseries of others as a demand upon their compassion, the wants of others as a claim on their abundance, and the difficulties of others as a motive to the kind and the liberal exertion of their powers to relieve and bless them. Thus they will be, indeed, the children of their heavenly Father; otherwise they can neither be like God, nor be loved by him.

6. IF the world be ruled by God, and all things proceed according to his direction and appointment, how reasonable is it that we should cheerfully submit unto the present, and lay aside all anxieties about the future !

Is there something in your lot that you do not relish ? mend it if you can ; God gives you the power that you may use it. If you cannot, why do you repine ? If was God who appointed it unto you ; God's will must be done, and your's opposes it in vain. By your cheerful acquiescence you may make a virtue of necessity, and transform your afflictions into blessings. By your fretfulness and discontent you add affliction to affliction, you pervert the design of Providence in visiting you with them, you turn sorrows into crimes, you lose all the benefit of the divine visitations, you fondly throw away the occasions, and the means of dignifying your character, and magnifying your reward : you renounce the consolations of God and a good conscience, and double the burdens that might have sat very light upon you, had you but possessed your soul in patience, and in well doing committed your interest to Heaven.

IF my conscience does not smite me for my transgressions, if my heart does not teach me that my sufferings are the punishment of

my sins, and the ministers of God to awaken me to repentance, how soothing is the thought that I am not the sport of chance, or abandoned to a miserable fatality, but the care, the charge of Providence and God. How reviving is the thought, that all my sorrows come from thence, whence all my blessings flow. Is this cup administered by God, and shall I refuse to drink it? shall I drink it with reluctance and repining? that would be undutiful to him, and unfriendly to myself, for God, surely, never can be cruel to his people; God, surely, never can be deaf to their complaints; "he knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust." The almighty God, the Lord of nature, hath no interests to seek but the interests of his people. Wise as he is in counsel, abundant as he is in means, let me inculcate it upon my heart, that a more grateful would have been a less friendly lot, and that no other disposition of my person, of my affairs, of my circumstances, or of my friends, could so perfectly have answered the gracious purposes he bears to me; if, therefore, my hopes are blasted, believe, my soul, the blight is better for thee than the bloom; if my cares and labours have been frustrated, the disappointment is better for

thee than success.* If thou be in heaviness, it is not without need; some end thy afflictions have, and that end is good, because God is love. If a friend has wounded me, if an enemy has injured me, let me not resent it; let me not indulge my wrath; let me not confine my attention unto them; let me ask, who bade them strike me? who placed me in their reach? let me consider it as the deed of God, and let me say, "It is the Lord, do with me what seemeth to thee good." While I sit under the shadow of affliction, how does it compose my mind, and reconcile me to my state; how does it gild the gloom, and make

* Of the great efficacy of a firm practical belief in this most important doctrine, so honorable to God, so consolatory to man, his erring, frail, imperfect creature, "whose life is even as a shadow which soon vanisheth away," there cannot be a more striking instance than in the example of the author of these Discourses. Subject in early youth, and particularly whilst at college, to distressing head-achs, suffering afterwards repeated heavy losses, and exposed to many trying privations, his fortitude and habitual serenity of mind never for a moment forsook him: it is of God, was the language of his heart, let him do what seemeth to him best! Afterwards, in the year 1791, when many days of future usefulness seemed yet to remain, and many subjects of desirable investigation were still unfinished, he was suddenly attacked by a severe stroke of the palsy, which not only put a stop to his literary labours, but wholly disabled him for ever resuming those ministerial duties which were always his joy and delight. From this he gradually and slowly, though

adversity put on a smile; to think that it was God who led me thither, and that it is God who sustains me there! Peace then, my rising passions; courage, my dejected soul; collect thy fortitude, maintain thy character, hold fast thy hope, and let faith wipe away thy tears. “ Although the fig-tree shall
 “ not blossom, neither shall there be fruit in
 “ the vine; though the labour of the olive
 “ shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat;
 “ though the flock should be cut off from the
 “ fold, and there should be no herd in the stall,
 “ yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in
 “ the God of my salvation.”

but imperfectly recovered, when in the year 1793, a second attack, in some respects more severe than the first, seemed to threaten the entire destruction of those fine intellectual powers which the former had injured but not annihilated. Of all this he was fully sensible: “ I once knew a little,” he was accustomed to say; but not a complaint or a murmur, through the wearisome day or the tedious winter evening, ever escaped him. He was uniformly cheerful, and always truly thankful that he could sometimes dictate to an amanuensis from his interesting short-hand papers (of which these Discourses formed a part), leaving what might or might not be their future usefulness in His hands “ of whom, and to whom, and through whom are all things.”

Reader, in the hour of anxiety and distress, be this also thy consolation—That “ the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works :” a strong rock and tower of defence to all those who put their trust in his goodness! EDITOR.

THUS said the prophet. Happy prophet! we admire thy piety, we reverence thy faith. And are we then under a better dispensation, under a more glorious Exemplar, under a more illustrious display of the divine mercy and compassion, and are we yet to teach in the great duties of resignation and of trust in God? Make haste, my friends, to learn the important and delightful lesson, for there is no true peace in this uncertain, changeful world, till ye can rejoice in the government of God, and say, in the unaffected triumphs of devotion, "Father, glorify thy name; not my will, but thine, O God, be done."

A JUST acquiescence in the present, will banish all solicitude about the future; the same principles will cure you both of discontent and of anxiety. If it be a just deduction, that because God reigneth my present lot is good, a true occasion of satisfaction and thanksgiving; it is as reasonable a conclusion, that because God will reign for ever, the future lot of all who dutifully commend their interests to him, shall for ever be dispensed to them with unerring wisdom, and with perfect love. Quit, then, your cares, my friends, and cast your burdens on God. Take an apostle's counsel: "Be careful for nothing, but in all things, by prayer and supplica-

“ tion with thanksgiving, let your requests
 “ be made known unto God ; and that peace
 “ of his, which passeth understanding, shall
 “ keep your hearts and minds through Christ
 “ Jesus.”

I KNOW not what the present hour is leading on, and why should I wish to know ? The government of the world is not mine ; it is in better hands ; in the best hands ; in the hands of God : and can you not trust God ? can his wisdom err ? can his power fail ? can his goodness hurt you ? If he offer thee the determination of thy own circumstances, wouldst thou not be a fool to take it ? If thou knewest thyself, wouldst thou not most earnestly deprecate so dreadful a calamity ?— Wouldst thou not most fervently beseech him that he would not abandon thee to thine own folly, and thy own weakness ? Wouldst thou not return the offer unto God, and adore his condescension and his grace, that he would stoop to notice thee, and to interest himself in the management of thy affairs ? Mind thou thy duty then, for that is thine ; God will mind thy interests, for that is his. Do ye the work that he has given you to do ; it depends on God to provide for your present comfort, as well as to pay you your last reward.

MANY other practical consequences of no little moment, might be deduced from the providence and government of God. But as your time requires me to recall my thoughts, I shall only just mention to you the following.

7. IF the government of the world, and the disposal of its affairs, be God's, it becomes us, at all times, to maintain a humble sense of our dependance upon him, and to form all our schemes and purposes not only in conformity to his laws, so that we propose nothing that is wrong, but also in submission to his pleasure and appointment, so that we expect nothing but as he wills.

IF the government of the world were in our hands, we might take our measures, and form our expectations peremptorily and absolutely; since it is not, let us be instructed by those reflections that arise from this passage of the apostle: "Go to now, ye that say to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain, whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow, for that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that."

FINALLY, my brethren, since one is our Master, let our hearts be one. Since we are

the subjects of one empire, the members of one family, let us unite our endeavours to promote the glory of our King, and the common interests of his kingdom. Obedient ourselves, let us do what we can to recover the disobedient to their allegiance, and to retain the faithful in it. To our example, to our admonitions, to our remonstrances, to our labours, let us add our prayers. With one heart, day and night, let us address our common Lord, and say unto him, in the words of his beloved Son, "Thy kingdom come, and thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Amen.

DISCOURSE FOURTEENTH.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS, WHEN
THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT?*

IN our last Discourse on the practical remarks arising from this subject, we observed,

5. **THAT** if God be a great King over all the earth, then we, of whatever nation, tongue, or kindred, are all fellow subjects.

6. **THAT** if the world be ruled by God, and all things proceed according to his direction and appointment, how reasonable is it that we should submit cheerfully to the present, and lay aside all anxiety about the future?

7. **THAT** if the government of the world, and the disposal of its affairs, be God's, it becomes us, at all times, to maintain a humble sense of our dependence upon him. We would now observe,

8. THAT if God is the supreme ruler of all events, we may hope well concerning the issues of this present scene.

WHENCE came evil? is a question, the solution of which, even from the earliest ages whereof we have any information, has been most anxiously sought for by the thoughtful and the serious among mankind. It seems that this question had occupied the minds of men long before the earliest records of the human race that are come down to us, for even in the story of the creation there seems to be continually an oblique reference to the evil that was in the world, and the origin of that evil, in the reflection that the narrator adds, at the end of every day's work concerning the productions of that day, viz. "God saw that it was good." The gradual improvements of science have been gradually lessening the painful impressions which the appearance of evil, in the works of God, is apt to make upon a pious and reflective mind. Many things, both in nature and in providence, which, in the eyes of former ages hung like a thick cloud upon the glories of the divine character, to us, more advantageously situated, and better furnished for the view, reflect those glories in the clearest and most striking light. From this consideration

there arises no inconsiderable degree of hope, that the time will come, perhaps, in this world, when our successors of the human race shall see, with full conviction, that even those things which now remain with us as difficulties in the creation and providence of God, are no less faithful witnesses of his wisdom and his goodness, than those plainer and more obvious instances of them which we most cordially admire and praise. The improvements of science concur with the declarations of religion to assure us, that “the counsel of the Lord standeth firm for ever;” that “without him nothing comes to pass;” and, that as all things were created, so all things are disposed and governed by a power that is uncontrollable, directed by unerring wisdom, and actuated by the purest sentiments of benignity and love. “Is there evil in the city,” saith the prophet, “and the Lord hath not done it?” If God be the sovereign ruler of the world, though the question were asked of every city in every region of the earth, the reply must be in God’s own language: “I kill and I make alive; I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord, do all these things.” Who could do them but himself? for there is not a power in nature that is not

under his control; not a principle but derives its being from him. How important is this truth! How joyful are its consequences. Of what moment to the peace and happiness of mankind! How full of hope and consolation! ‘All I feel and all I fear, does it come, and must it come from God? Then my sufferings are blessings, for in God there is no malignity; my pains and my apprehensions are good for me; though for the present not joyous but grievous, they will yield to me hereafter a far more exceeding and more lasting weight of glory.’* For the present in appearance, deformed and offensive like the putrifying seed, like that seed arisen up into verdure, bloom, and fragrance, and abounding with inviting and refreshing fruits, our present troubles must become hereafter

* How strikingly, whilst this edition has been preparing for the press, has the unspeakable importance been exemplified of deeply impressing these great and momentous truths upon the heart and mind. In the beginning of the present month, how elate with hope and joy was every British bosom; how fondly anticipating many future years of national prosperity and peace under the judicious auspices of a most amiable, virtuous princess, and her illustrious descendants, of whose excellent education the greatest hopes were formed from the high character of the parents, so marked by moderation, by good sense, and by exemplary conduct! Alas! in a few short days, how has the prospect changed, how afflictively has the bright scene been

our delights : if not in this world, yet in some better world to come they will bless us with their friendly shade, and will yield us, to use the apostle's language, " the fruits of righteousness, which are life, and peace, and joy, " for evermore."

IN the eye of God the previous evil coalesces with the following good, and is absorbed in the superior happiness that it produces. What he sees in prospect we shall behold in retrospect. When death has purged our sight, and enlarged our sphere of observation, when the great year of God's government has gone round, when every principle of this preparatory state has put forth all its influences, and the harvest is fully come, then, in our view, will the sufferings of this life be swallowed up in the enjoyment of the next, and nothing will present itself before us but

overcast, and the future prospects of these united kingdoms enveloped in clouds and darkness ! In vain will the future historian endeavour to pourtray the heartfelt sorrow at this moment so universally felt ! May his faithful page be enabled to record that the sad event produced a salutary effect on the national character, and more especially in the higher ranks of life ; that many of the licentious were overawed, the profligate reclaimed, and the proud and arrogant brought to confess " that the Most High God ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and appointeth " over them whomsoever he will." EDITOR.

November 19, 1817.

one immense survey in every object, and in every occurrence glorifying the great Lord of all, and prompting us to praise him, and rejoice in him for ever !

THE clouds that hang upon this present scene shed no more darkness on it than that with which God has chosen to overcast it. If God be good, and there be no power by which his power is controllable, the clouds must vanish, and the scene must brighten, and all must end well at last. Pain must cease ; error must have an end ; vice must be extirpated ; death must be destroyed ; and the scene which these glorious revolutions will lead on must be better in the whole, and to every individual of God's faithful subjects better than the issue could have been from any other initiatory scene, in which error, vice, and pain, and death ; had had no place. These glorious revolutions you will see ; God grant that you may have a joyful share in them. Fix yourselves, my friends, in the firm persuasion of this truth ; for if God be the King eternal and immortal, an indisputable truth it is. Fix yourselves in the firm persuasion of it. It will animate your obedience to the will of God, it will compose you into the most placid resignation to his pleasure, it will enable you to think well of life,

and of all its circumstances and vicissitudes; it will reconcile you even to death itself, and support you under all that you must suffer from it.

To attain this state of mind it may help you to remember the example of Jesus. His day of duty was dark and cloudy, thick overspread with sorrow, beset with difficulties, and ending in the acutest sufferings, and the most painful death. But did he desert his duty because it was difficult? And how did all this suffering end? Is he now in heaviness, despised, reviled, combating with error and prejudice? No, my friends, he, our great Exemplar, is sat down on the right-hand of God; he has led captivity captive; and if we, like him, are faithful unto death, we also shall receive a crown of life.

9. IF the Lord God Almighty reigneth, then there is no other power to whom we can owe an unlimited and unreserved obedience.

FOR the powers that be, are of God; they are his creatures and his subjects, and have no authority but that which is derived from him; against his authority, therefore, their authority is nothing. By whatever penal sanctions their injunctions, or their prohibitions, may be guarded, with you, Christians,

they are to have no weight ; for where their demands interfere with the demands of God, you have a very clear and peremptory rule to guide you. “ Fear not them,” says the great Legislator of the Christian church, “ fear not them who can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear; fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast both soul and body into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.” You may have come under authority by your birth, by your own personal engagements, or by the deed of Providence; but your submission to such authority, if it has no other bounds, must always be with exception and reserve for your absolute submission to the supreme authority of God. This exception extends not only to the obedience that parents and masters may require of you, it affects alike the obedience that civil governors may demand of you, and the subjection that you owe to parliaments and kings. Disobey God, and who can screen you from the justice of the only Potentate? but of the only Potentate what doubt can you entertain that, in asserting his authority against every other, he will defend you against their resentment, or indemnify you for all that you may suffer from it? Does any

human authority demand of you an unlimited obedience? reject the demand, for it is an impious infringement of the rights of God. Passive obedience, unlimited submission, are these doctrines preached to you? Tell the sycophant who preaches them, that it is an absurdity and an iniquity to gratify the ambition of an individual at the expense of the whole species; and while thus he seeks to bask himself in the sunshine of princely favour, he forgets the duty that he owes unto the only Potentate, who warrants no man, of whatever rank or title, to injure or oppress another. Does any human authority attempt to interfere in matters of religion, to impose upon you articles of faith which Christ has not imposed, and to require of you modes of worship which Christ has not required? Faithful in your allegiance to the only Potentate, and to him whom he hath constituted head over all things to his church, resist that authority. In every thing that is virtuous, that is innocent, that is indifferent, be ye exemplary in your obedience to the powers that are set over you; but in every other thing, stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free: maintain the truth as it is in Jesus, and receive you no adulteration of it; let your professions ever answer

to the convictions of your minds; and on no occasion, under no pretence, for no consideration whatsoever, contract the guilt of hypocrites and unbelievers. Betray any thing rather than your Christian privileges; oppose any thing rather than the truth of God; forego any thing rather than the comforts of good conscience, and incur any thing rather than become enemies to the cross of Christ: give unto Cæsar every thing that is Cæsar's; but if Cæsar should demand it of you, to counteract the convictions of your minds; if he should require of you to receive for Christian truth what you are persuaded is not such; if he would compel you to deny what you are persuaded is, or would only prohibit you to profess it; remembering the superior precept of the King eternal and immortal, by Christ his oracle and our Lord, tell him with respect, but tell him it with firmness too, that these things are not his, and give not unto Cæsar any thing that is God's.

10. IF God be the Sovereign of the universe, a great King over all the earth, if without him nothing come to pass, if all things proceed according to the counsels of his will, and are regulated by the operations of his providence, it becomes us and behoves us to pay a serious and continual attention to the current of events.

FOR if it be true, that God is the source, the controller and director of all power, what are the occurrences of life? They are the deeds of God. And shall an almighty agent be continually exhibiting before us the displays of wisdom without error, and of goodness without partiality, and yet we be stupidly inobservant of his conduct? The occurrences of life discover his perfections, they manifest his will, they reveal the principles of his government: to an attentive mind, they declare all these things as intelligibly as his works; they suggest to us many lessons both of admonition and of consolation which his works cannot read to us; for in this state of discipline, as we have endeavoured to show, there is the highest reason to believe, that the occurrences of life are accommodated in such a manner to our characters and our circumstances, as to afford us all desirable advantages for the enjoyment, or the improvement of the present life, for the correction of what God approves not in our characters, and for the confirmation and advancement of what he does approve. While we pass through life, therefore, and the vicissitudes of life, without thought, without observation, and without reflection, we may miss the lessons that we want, and we may lose the consola-

tions that we need. Look at the life you live, and observe at least what presents itself to you in the road that you are travelling.

HAVE you seen the fraudulent and insincere prospering for a little time by the wiliness and the intricacy of their conduct, and at length betrayed, exposed, and overwhelmed, by the contempt and indignation of mankind? Have you seen the sensual and self-indulgent, by their inordinate love of pleasure, diverted from the noblest pursuits, disqualified for the best enjoyment of the present life, and cheated even of life itself, while they were yet dreaming of prolonging it in growing jollity and self-enjoyment? Have you seen the adulatory and the interested disappointed of the objects that they sought, at the expense of so much time, and so much truth, and so much self-abasement? Have you seen the upright, the honest, the sincere, the contented, the undesigning, favoured by Divine Providence, perhaps beyond all that their own industrious exertions, or probable expectation, could have promised? Have you seen the mask pulled off from the hypocritical and sanctimonious, and all which that mask had, for many years perhaps concealed from the observation of mankind, exposed to their derision and resentment? Have you seen the idle become

vicious, and of vicious, profligate, and of profligate, incorrigible? Have you seen the giddy and the gay become first thoughtless, and then averse to thinking, and afterwards incapable of thinking, proof against the most serious admonitions, and the most affecting spectacles, and the most alarming expectations? Have you seen the fairest prospects blasted, and the sweetest hopes extinguished? Have you seen the sweetest hopes accomplished, and yet vexation, bitterness, and sorrow, following that accomplishment? Have you seen the most unpromising appearances issuing, when duty or when prudence called to meet them, in peace, in comfort, and in happiness? Have you seen the happiest connexions broken, and the most unfortunate protracted? Have you seen the career of hope and joy plunging suddenly into distresses and despair? Have you seen the solitary walk of affliction and of melancholy, rising as suddenly into comfort and enjoyment? Have you seen the old surviving both their pleasures and their usefulness? Have you seen the young dying when they thought to live, and extended on the bed of death when their imaginations had been picturing before them a very different scene? Have you seen the healthy and the strong in

the maturity, in the stablest period of life, when their dependents rested on them as on a rock that should not fail, and when their own hearts were exulting in the prospect of long utility and of long improvement; these have you seen vanishing as a vapour, and sinking suddenly like a full blown flower that has been eaten at the root? These things have been seen, and they are seen every day. Think, my friends, what say these occurrences unto you? There are lessons that they read you, and these lessons are so plain and so affecting, that if you will attend only to the spectacle which is exhibited, you will need no help of mine either to interpret or to enforce them.

DISCOURSE FIFTEENTH.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 37.

*WHO IS HE THAT SAITH, AND IT COMETH TO PASS, WHEN
THE LORD COMMANDETH IT NOT ?*

WE observed, in our last Discourse, on the practical remarks drawn from the consideration of the universal and uncontrollable government of God,

IN the eighth place, that if God is the supreme Ruler of all events, we may hope well concerning the issues of the present scene.

9. **THAT** if the Lord God Almighty reigneth, then there is no other power to whom we can owe an unlimited and unreserved obedience.

10. **THAT** if God be the Sovereign of the universe, it becomes us and behoves us to pay a serious and continual attention to the

current of events. And this brings me in the

11th, and last place, to one of the most important, and yet most neglected subjects, in the whole of practical religion, namely, that if without God nothing comes to pass, it becomes us, and behoves us to acquire, to maintain, and cultivate the spirit of devotion. By the spirit of devotion, I understand, an habitual sense of God upon the heart, a powerful tendency of thought towards him, an easy susceptibility of every religious affection, a lively sensibility of soul to every thing that is in God, that comes from God, or is connected with him; and a constant proneness of mind to unite and intermingle the idea of the great Creator and Ruler of the universe with all the other thoughts, perceptions, and sentiments of our hearts.

SUCH is the temper of which I speak.—The man in whom this spirit lives, sees God in every thing that surrounds him, or occurs to him, and regards him in all he is, and in all he does. In his view, the heaven is God's throne, and the earth is his footstool. The clouds are his chariot, and he walketh on the wings of the wind. Does the rising sun awake him to his duty? it is God that has bestowed on him another day. Does the night inter-

rupt his labours? it is God who invites him to refreshment and repose: Does he cast his eye upon the busy scenes of life? it is God who, by their social principles and mutual wants, has bound mankind unto each other, and united them in families, and cities, and communities. Retiring from the busy scenes of life, does he lift his eye by night unto the starry firmament? it is the breath of God that has kindled those immortal fires. By day does he fix his view upon the swelling ocean, watching how its waves succeed to spend themselves and die upon the shore? it is the hand of God that sunk the channel they possess, and it is his decree which has prescribed to them a bound that they may not pass. Do the gayer and more varied beauties of the earth on which he stands invite his contemplation? it is God that has lifted up those awful hills, and it is the same mighty hand that waters and adorns those fruitful valleys: it is God that variegates the vernal bloom, that entiches the autumnal harvest, that raises, and directs, and restrains, and employs, unto the wisest and the kindest purposes, the summer's warmth, and the winter's storm; he provideth both for man and beast.

To him, in whose heart the spirit of devotion reigns, all nature is a book, in which he reads of God, or a mirror in which he sees

the image of his glorious perfections. Every unconscious being is a monument that bears inscribed upon it the signature of omnipotence; and every individual of the sensible creation is a member of his mighty family, who openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desires of every living thing. Is such a man in health and prosperity? God is his sun and shield: is his health declining, and his comfort failing, and his substance wasting? it is God that is taking from him what he gave. Is he injured and oppressed by the wicked? the wicked are God's sword. Do those of better character, of milder temper, and more candid judgment, esteem, and protect, and help him? they are the instruments of divine mercy, and the almoners of divine bounty. Have the works, the providences, the word, or ordinances of God, excited in his heart the sacred sentiments of piety? he relishes these blessed affections; he is well pleased that they have found their way into his heart; he likes his heart the better that it is so well affected towards God. He does not willingly or hastily expose it to the influence of any foreign objects, however innocent their influence might be. He finds too great a pleasure in the consciousness of devout affections to sacrifice them at the shrine of vanity or dissipation, or at any other shrine. He keeps

his heart with all diligence, that it may not be forsaken by such welcome guests ; and it is an object of serious attention, and of studious care with him, to cherish and retain them in his breast. Is he tempted? he says as Joseph did ; how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God. Has he erred? the language of his heart sunk in contrition and repentance is, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight." Has he overcome temptation and done well? it is God that has preserved him from the accusations of an evil conscience. "By his grace," says he, "I am what I am."

SUCH is the spirit of devotion, and such the character of the man in whom it breathes. Can there be a character, can there be a temper more correspondent to the conviction of this important truth, that without God, nothing is, and nothing comes to pass? that as he is the first great parent mind, so he is the only Potentate? Would the contrary dispositions, would the opposite affections, correspond as well to this conviction? There needs not a single word to satisfy you fully, that they would not.

IF God be the only Potentate, and such you have seen he is ; if he be the source of power, the controller of events, the spring by which every movement of the universe is

actuated; if it is God that gives us understanding, God is, and is observing, and is acting, in all places at all times; and if God be every where, in what place can it become us to forget him? And if God at all times encompasses our path, and our lying down, and is at all times within our hearts, at what hour can it become us to be regardless and insensible of him? If there is not one scene in nature but speaks to us of an invisible Creator; if in providence there is not one occurrence but speaks to us of an invisible Disposer of the world and its affairs, in what scene can it become us to shut up our hearts against the influence of those divine perfections it displays; or in respect of what occurrence is it decent that we should not own the hand of God? If it is God that gives us understanding, if it is God that gives external nature the power to awaken in us those ideas, and those sentiments of which that understanding is conscious, is it right, approvable, and laudable, that God should not be in all our thoughts? If all things are full of God, can that heart be what it should be that is devoid of pious sentiments and devout affections? None of you will say so; and none of you can think so.

IN a world, where every atom has its place appointed it by God, where not a motion

rises but it is God that actuates it, nor a thought exists but it is God that gives it being, in such a world, what can be more unamiable, what more unnatural or more unjustifiable, than an indevout and irreligious heart? Observe, my friends, the consequences that this position will draw after it. Worldliness is a great enemy to devotion, and dissipation is as great an enemy. What then are we to think of worldliness and of dissipation? Can we approve them? Shall we vindicate them? May we allow ourselves in them? Your own hearts will make the answer for me, and to them I can appeal, that while you are engrossed by the interests or the vanities of this world, you are by no means so sensible as you yourselves think you ought to be, to the power, the benignity, and the various perfections of that unseen hand which governs it. While your hearts are continually exposed to the influences of this world, they grow callous and incapable of sublimer sentiments; devotion cannot thrive in them. So fair a flower will not grow upon the flinty rock; and whoever has conversed with observation and attention in the world, whoever has remarked the occasional influence of worldly cares or vanities upon his own heart, would look for the spirit of devotion as soon in the marble statue, as for the prevalence

of it in their hearts, whose desires are continually stretching after the riches, or the splendors, or the pleasures of the world.

DEVOTION is a delicate and tender plant: as much as it is our duty and our interest to be possessed of it, it is not easily acquired, neither can it be carelessly maintained. It must be long tended, diligently cultivated, and affectionately cherished, before it will have struck its roots so deep as to grow up and flourish in our hearts; and all along, till it attains to its perfect vigour and maturity in heaven, it needs to be defended from the adverse influences of things seen and temporal, of a vain imagination and an earthly mind.

THE best season for acquiring the spirit of devotion is in early life: it is then attained with the greatest facility; and at that season there are peculiar motives for the cultivation of it. Would you make sure of giving unto God his right, and of rendering to the great Creator and Governor of the world the glory due unto his name, begin to do it soon: before the glittering vanities of life have dazzled and enslaved your imagination, before the sordid interests of this world have gotten possession of your soul, before the habits of ambition or of avarice, or of voluptuousness, or of dissipation, have enthralled you; while your minds are yet free, and your hearts yet

tender, present them unto God. It will be a sacrifice superlatively acceptable unto him, and not less advantageous to yourselves.— Beseech him that he will awaken in you every sentiment of piety; beseech him that he will direct and prosper your endeavours, to acquire, to keep alive, and to improve, the genuine spirit of devotion. Intreat him that he will give you to behold himself in whatever else you see, and to discern his providence in all the events that you observe, or that you experience. Put your hearts into his hands, and importune him, (if importunity it may be called,) to lay them open unto all the blessed influences of the discoveries he has made of himself and of his will, in his works, or in his ways, or in his word. Implore him to give you, and preserve to you, the liveliest sensibility to all things, spiritual and divine; and while thus you ask it, seek for it, in the conscientious use of the appointed means of grace, and by every method that intelligence, and prudence, and experience, recommend to you. Let it be a perpetual object with you every day, to be improving in this heavenly temper. The spirit of devotion will be very hard to kindle in the frozen bosom of old age, and not very easy to introduce through the giddy heads into the busy hearts of manhood, or advanced youth. I

do not love to speak evil of the world, and you know that I am no advocate for superstition and austerity; yet in fidelity to you, my friends, I must say, that in my apprehension, at least, such are the present manners of the world, such the mode of education in it, such its prevailing prejudices and customs, such the natural influences of conversing ordinarily in it, such the views of life and happiness which it inspires, that if the spirit of devotion be not formed in early youth, there is much danger that it will never be acquired at all. Though I might, without any degree of self-complacency, imagine that my habits are now formed, yet I am well persuaded, that if I should, even for a little time, accompany some, who by no means think disadvantageously of themselves, and who are thought well of by the world, through all the scenes, the conversations, the amusements, the idlenesses, into which day after day delivers them, the spirit of devotion would be totally evaporated from my heart; and except, perhaps, that the sentiments of compassion might occasionally agitate it, as to all the better passions of our nature, it would soon be lulled into a stagnant and unbroken calm. What you experience or apprehend I know not, but my judgment must be directed by that maxim of the pro-

phet, that "as face answers unto face in water, so is the heart of man." If you wish then to reach that better world, where devotion, pure and ardent, is one of the most striking characters of its inhabitants, and, at the same time, one of the most essential ingredients in the happiness that they enjoy, you cannot be too early, and you cannot be too constant in your endeavours to acquire and maintain the spirit of devotion. It is an acquisition well worth all that it can cost you to attain it; for if the genuine spirit of devotion occupies your heart, it will preserve you from the corruptions that are in the world, it will give you courage to be singular; when to do your duty it will be necessary to be singular; it will make all your duties easy, and most of them it will make pleasant to you; it will shed the sweetest light upon the pleasing scenes and incidents of life, and will diffuse its cheering rays even over the darkest and most gloomy.

THE pleasures that you may take, will be infinitely more enjoyed by you, if God, the Author of them, has possession of your hearts; and the pains you cannot shun, will be far less grievous to you, if God, who maketh darkness and createth evil, be regarded by you as the wise and kind Dispenser of your lot. Remember, then, while you are yet

entering upon life, “remember your Creator
 “in the days of your youth, before the evil
 “day comes, and the years draw nigh, in
 “which ye shall say, I have no pleasure in
 “them.” Those will be bad days to acquire
 and cultivate the spirit of devotion: but the
 spirit of devotion, acquired and cultivated,
 and confirmed before, will convert those bad
 days into good ones. If you would be happy
 when you die, be pious while you live. If
 you would be cheerful when you are old, be
 religious while you are young. These objects
 you will acknowledge are well worthy your
 pursuit; and to your own convictions I ap-
 peal, that there are no other means by which
 you can attain these objects. To those who
 have let that golden opportunity slip by
 them; whose youth is past, and the spirit of
 devotion not attained; whose manhood is
 arrived, and that temper not yet formed;
 whose old age is come, and their hearts still
 sensual, frivolous, and vain; I have no comfort
 to administer, for I have no authority to
 comfort you. Your best friends can only pity
 you and pray for you, that God will take
 away your stony hearts, and give you hearts
 of flesh. He can do it, no doubt; will he do
 it, is the question. Never, my young friends,
 never let that question be asked concerning
 you. Surely you do not envy their condition,

concerning whom it may be justly asked? take heed that you do not come into their place.

To conclude: do not fear to admit the sentiments, and to cultivate the spirit of devotion; there is nothing tedious, dull, or irksome in it. It is pleasant even as pleasure's self. Though I am about to adopt the language of a poet, it is not the language of imagination merely that I speak; what has been said of liberty, with some degree of truth, may, with the most perfect truth, be said of the genuine spirit of devotion, it alleviates trouble, and enhances pleasure,

“ It makes the gloomy face of nature gay,

“ Gives beauty to the sun, and pleasure to the day.”

ADDISON' CATO.

THE END.

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